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THE ROAD TO LAMALAND

THE AUTHOR ON THE KHARDONG PASS (p. 209)

[*Frontispiece*

THE ROAD TO LAMALAND

IMPRESSIONS OF A JOURNEY TO WESTERN THIBET

BY

"GANPAT"

(M. L. A. GOMPERTZ)

60614

"We are the pilgrims, Master; we will go
Always a little further, it may be
Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow."

JAMES ELROY FLECKER.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

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TO

MY MOTHER

"'Ganpat' was the sobriquet the sepoys had bestowed on the Captain when, as a very callow second lieutenant, he had been posted to an Indian infantry regiment. He was long and thin, and it would have been difficult to conceive any one more unlike the conventional presentment of the jovial, pot-bellied, elephant-headed deity of good fortune known to India at large as 'Ganesh' and to the Mahrattas as 'Ganpat.' But it was the nearest his men's tongues could get to his real name, and so it stuck."

—"Landgrabbing,"
Blackwood's Magazine, 1916.

The Nagri inscription below the god's picture is his name; pronounced "Gunput." He is a kindly soul and even the mouse gets a meal in his shelter.

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CHAPTER I

WE TAKE THE ROAD

SITTING in my office in Murree, supported on three sides by enormous bundles of correspondence, files which had somehow or other to be kept moving either upwards, downwards, or sideways, the thought of my immediate boss in his oldest and most beloved clothes, rejoicingly casting a line into the pleasant waters of a Kashmir trout stream, recurred insistently to my mind, theoretically engrossed in the multifarious cares of military administration.

There were three of us in that particular office—the super-boss, my immediate chief, and my humble self—and a month previously the second-named had departed on sixty days' "privilege" leave, a title invented by the Government lest any of its servants might rashly think he had a right to leave. The super-boss and I had divided the work between us and carried on, but the mental vision of someone doing nothing in Arcadia hung heavy about the little room.

Eventually I tackled the super-boss and he,

being of the proper kind, affixed his neat signature to my request for sixty days of this same "privilege" leave.

Arose the question of where to go? I asked Dog Bill—comatose under my office table, for the day was warm—and he merely yawned, which didn't help very much. Even the suggestion of Kashmir didn't draw him, though from previous years it ought to have evoked stimulating recollections of a dreamy river life where little fox-terrier dogs could get all the fights they wanted with over-sized, under-bred, village pariahs with interludes of hunting frogs along the river banks, sitting in pools of mountain streams, chasing birds under the pine trees, and generally leading an even more perfectly happy and aimless life than they do elsewhere.

Eventually I went home and asked the puppies, but they merely bit my stockings—and incidentally me—and implied that so long as three meals a day and all the sponges, soap, socks, and shoes in the world were provided for them to sharpen their teeth on, they didn't care where we went. Vixen certainly looked thoughtful for a space, but when I had removed the remains of my slipper heel from the suspicious bulge in her left cheek—she became as unmeditative as her brother Vagrant.

Vixen and Vagrant are of importance to this record, for they were the life and soul of the party. They were rising two months when the story opens and a more picturesque pair it would have been hard to find. By pedigree they are rough-haired kennel terriers and I have seen their ancestors for three generations, but Vagrant entered the world with a smooth coat and evidently intends to keep it. They are never still except when asleep and they have the most wonderful noses for digging out things that are better forgotten. Vixen has a bulldog-like habit of hanging on grimly to my stockings or to the immaculate white baggy trousers of Abdul Ghani, my Punjabi servant and maid-of-all-work, who looks after me, my motor-car, and the three dogs. Finding it hard to get his tongue round their names, he refers to the pups as *wuh log* (those people) or *yeh log* (these people).

Yeh log implies two little white (or whitish) figures generally with suspiciously dirty paws and noses, sitting together on their tails with pink tongues hanging out—mute pictures of childish innocence. *Wuh log* means two very small objects (grey, khaki, or greeny black according to the class of mud obtained) in the distance, with Ghani in the foreground displaying parts of a sponge or the remains of a pair of

socks which he had carefully darned (or rather cobbled with wool of a different hue) the previous evening.

So, since the household refused to help me with suggestions as to where we should go, I was thrown on my own resources. Savage leave was indicated—somewhere in the blue—somewhere where people don't dress for dinner or expect to have cards left on them—somewhere in the high hills under the snow. I had been in correspondence with two or three political officers on the matter, rather unsuccessfully, and was somewhat despondent, for, owing to various reasons, the more attractive places seemed inaccessible. And then like manna in the desert came a letter from the Political Officer at Leh offering me a permit for his part of the world, to which I forthwith wired a grateful acceptance.

Leh is the capital of Ladakh—and Ladakh is another name for Western Thibet, where they grow Lamas and yaks and monasteries and devil dancers. Ladakh is Thibet pure and simple, but in the thirties of the last century one Zorawar Singh—an adventurous general of the Dogra Maharajah Gulab Singh of Jummu on the edge of the Punjab—annexed it for his master, and when after the Sikh wars we sold the Vale of Kashmir to Gulab Singh, for a

nominal sum and an annual tribute of some shawl goats in perpetuity, Ladakh and Baltistan were thus linked up into a compact block with the Jummu territories. And so to-day, Gulab Singh's successors hold Gilgit, Baltistan, Ladakh, and Kashmir in addition to their own original state of Jummu—the whole forming, to my mind and to that of many others, the most fascinating corner of the Indian Empire, a strip that touches Afghanistan, Russian Turkestan, and Kashgaria—the Chinese New Dominion where lies old Marco Polo's route of the Middle Ages—the historic highway between West and East.

And thus it was that the moment my chief came back and took over the files with a heavy sigh, Abdul Ghani, Dog Bill, *yeh log*, and I took the road to Lamaland. We took it conventionally enough to begin with—in my Overland car, Ghani and I in front, the rest of the party piled up on the baggage on the back seat; and so we drove a hundred miles the first day along the winding road which follows the Jhelum river under the great pine-clad hills, to the pleasant little rest house of Uri, and setting out again early next morning made the remaining sixty miles into Srinagar—"the Venice of the East" as it has been called—the capital of

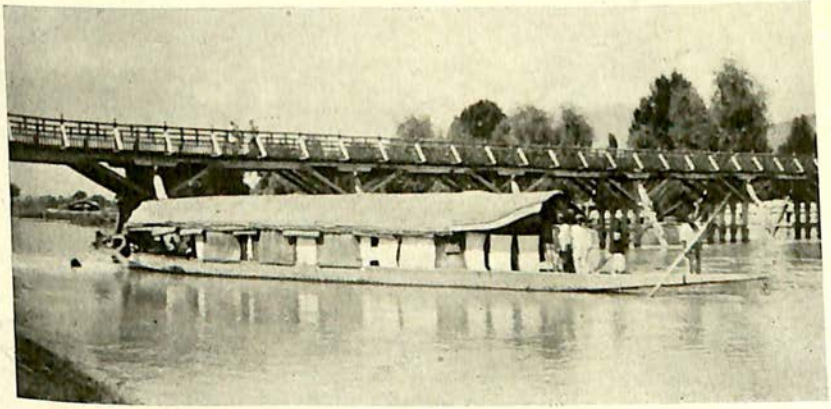
Kashmir. And there for our purposes the motor road ended, and twenty-four hours later we garaged the car with care for her two months' rest.

On the long tree-grown bund of Srinagar, above the placid Jhelum, I found waiting for me Habib Shah—a short, sturdy, bearded shikari—old follower of a friend of mine who was to join us a month later. He produced my letter as proof of identity and announced that he had a boat waiting for us to live in for the two days in Srinagar.

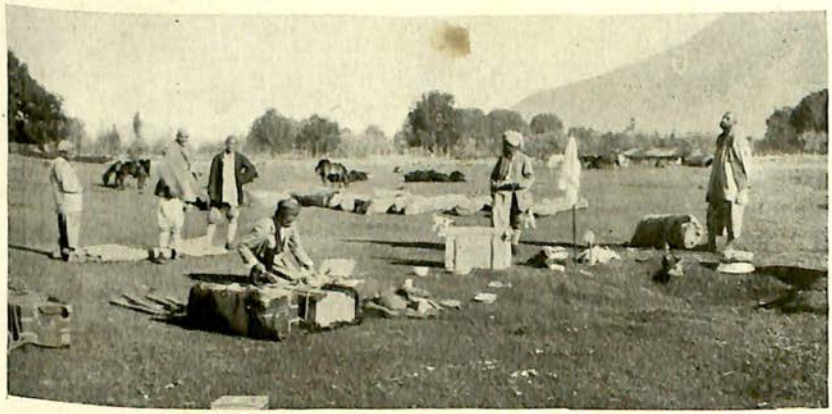
We drove to the spot indicated, and, lo and behold! no boat, so with true Eastern nonchalance Habib forthwith engaged another that happened to be near by—a little matted dunga, bearing the proud name of *Sans Pareil.* She was just the ordinary long, sharp-nosed, flat-bottomed barge of heavy timbers with roof and wall of rush matting and open spaces at prow and stern for the polers and paddlers when travelling. Three little rooms divided by rush partitions and curtains gave sitting-room, bedroom, and bathroom, with a niche for a pantry, while a crammed fo'c'sle at the wrong end fitted with a clay stove provided room for the crew, my following, and the kitchen.

We put the baggage on board and later

SRINAGAR, CITY OF THE WATERS (p. 5)



"THE *SANS PAREIL* SLIPPED DOWN-STREAM" (p. 13)



UNLOADING AT GANDARBAL (p. 13)

fetched the tents and camp gear we had had sent on ahead by lorry from the motor service depot, and then I sat down to a belated lunch. In the middle of this a loud splash followed by yells and shouts brought us running out to see a little black and white blob vanishing down stream. Vagrant—evidently under the pardonable impression that the main stream of the Jhelum was good smelly mud, suitable for a nice white pup to roll in, had leapt overboard. But he struck out gamely and a boat further down put out its shikara—the Kashmir dinghy—and he was retrieved, sneezing and shaking, but full of spirits. For a two-months-old pup who had never seen water except in a bath he swam well, little head above the muddy stream in the strong current, but thereafter *yeh log* were kept chained up for the time we remained on the *Sans Pareil*. This caused them intense annoyance, since Ghani was unpacking prior to making up loads fit for baggage animals, and the floor was covered with delectable morsels of socks and chaplis, sweaters and woolly gloves, and other such tooth-entangling dainties. So they yelped in discord and sorrow until sleep overtook them.

Evidently Ghani and I had a hard-bitten "been here before" look about us, for the

shikaras of the itinerant vendors of Kashmir goods who came alongside fled again with speed and left us in peace, while they harassed less sophisticated folk in the long lines of bigger houseboats moored up and down the banks.

After lunch came the endless round of the shops in search of stores and of things in which to carry them, and bargaining for leather mule-trunks and other camp gear took me up till dark. I suspect the Kashmiri of the possession of a carefully guarded secret whereby brown paper can be made to look, feel, and smell, but under no conditions wear, like leather. I have some experience in the matter and speak feelingly.

Then in the evening, with the lights of all the houseboats twinkling up and down the river, I sat on a crazy deck chair with two little well-filled, drum-tight, white doglets sprawling asleep over my toes and Dog Bill with drowsy eyes hanging his head over the side. As I explained my plans to the shikari—Leh and back in a month, 450 miles of the road on our flat feet—I could see the disappointment spreading over his face. He had visualised a nice, pleasant sahib who would sit peacefully in a Kashmir valley awaiting the red bear and the barasingh —the big stags—or if he went far afield would do so in search of ibex, of ammon, of shapu or

of markhor, the mountain goat and sheep of High Asia. And here was a lunatic who merely proposed to walk aimlessly, leaving his gun and rifle mouldering in their cases. However, "*Khair Salah*," which liberally translated means "*your* funeral"; and I suppose in saying that he endorsed the sentiment of the whole of the Orient—and incidentally much of the Occident—which Kipling has set forth so well:—

> "But Allah created the English mad,
> The maddest of all mankind."

So we settled that if everything could be got through in time we would push off down stream the following evening towards Shadipur, and so to Gandarbal, whence lies the road to High Asia, our road.

Next morning we departed early on our various errands, I to banks, post office, shops, and so on; Habib and Aziza—the newly engaged Kashmiri cook—to buy stores and other oddments in the city. There are two lots of shops on the Leh road, at intervals of over a hundred miles—one lot at Kargil and one at Leh itself. You can there buy flour and sugar, a little tea and matches, and sometimes meat, but little else, and in the intervening hundred-mile gaps, nothing except eggs, milk, and the

centipedal chicken of the East. So you see why we started with a month's food amongst our baggage—some two pony loads of eatables for six men and three dogs.

But at last it was more or less finished, and at 7 p.m., after a hurried dash ashore for the forgotten butter, we turned the *Sans Pareil's* nose out into the stream, and to the sing-song chant of the polers slid down the crowded waterway through the long succession of quaint old wooden bridges that link the huddle of buildings on either bank. There are brick-built houses, mud-built houses, mud roofs covered with grass and flowers, quaintly carved wooden water fronts, conical temples with roofs of gilded tin, and latticed windows from any of which Ashoo might have dropped the rose to her lover. And so, as the shadows fell and the lights broke out everywhere, we left Srinagar behind us and slipping through the lock entered the long, silent, dusky stretches below, embarked on our journey to Lamaland.

Life had been strenuous these late months and it was pleasant to sit on the deck forward and talk of everything and nothing with Habib and Abdul Ghani in that rare time of evening when men sometimes say what they really think. Ghani surprised me by his logical ex-

position of the advantages and disadvantages of our rule in India, of the fact that we had opened it up with railways everywhere so that trade boomed and prices rose to compare with other countries, to the disadvantage of the poorer villager and the demoralisation of those who scored by the high prices. He balanced against this the security of life and property and the boon of equal justice for all and individual freedom, citing an incident when he had been dismissed without his wages by a temporary officer at the end of the war, and on complaint to the European magistrate of the district had been awarded his claim at once. Such a happening as an inferior obtaining his rights from a superior was in his view absolutely unthinkable under Oriental rule.

Abdul Ghani has that valuable asset, a remarkably shrewd brain concealed behind rather a foolish face to which nature has thrown in gratis a swivel eye. He must get a lot of fun out of life with the unwary.

I awoke to the perfect beauty of a Kashmir dawn on the Sind river, for we had turned out of the Jhelum while I slept. The men had tied up to the reed-grown bank for an hour's rest, so slipping on my chaplis and a dressing-gown I took the dogs for a run and they all went mad

chasing the myriads of little frogs at the water's edge.

Dawn of pearl and gold, of great mist-wreathed mountains above long stretches of rush-grown waters, silver and lilac waters under the green of the turf banks and the silver-green of the willows. Memories of similar dawns in days spent in the Kashmir valley came back to me, and almost I hesitated to leave the charm of it all, to quit the dreamy charm of Arcadia for the long road whose starting-point lay ten miles ahead under those great mountains; almost I regretted the choice of the high passes and the snow-topped hills, the barren rocks and the stony road that have called to me so often. But only for a space, and then, as the boat pulled out again, sturdy figures of polers with humped shoulders silhouetted dark against the glinting water, I sat down and began oiling boots and chaplis and generally making ready for the road of the morrow.

Midday saw us at Gandarbal, the last navigable point on the Sind river before it changes to a swift, rock-strewn, mountain torrent, the air above the fast-flowing ice water pleasantly cool compared with the warmth of the tree-grown banks, and I took the dogs ashore for the last mile—Vixen and Vagrant's first real walk of

their little lives. Vixen, who landed like a powder puff, took five minutes to convert herself into the perfect imitation of a part-worn O-Cedar mop, and thereafter felt better. Despite an annoying habit of always running the opposite way when called, she actually reached the bridge where most of the house-boats tie up, and there made the acquaintance of a lady who proved to be my cousin, so that I was hospitably entreated for the rest of the day.

We camped on a stretch of turf and in the afternoon watched the *Sans Pareil* slide down stream again on her way home, and so felt that we were indeed near the start. Habib had made arrangements with a pony man from Dras for seven ponies and taken one rupee *sahi* from him. This is an admirable Kashmir scheme of earnest money whereby the person engaged puts down a deposit as guarantee that his services will be forthcoming. Unfortunately for the Dras man I went and looked over the ponies in the evening, and six out of the seven had sore backs. There were wailing and weeping and protestations that the magic charm of my baggage would heal the backs the moment it was placed on them. However, we had less belief in the healing power of our kit, and when a stalwart youth of the locality guaranteed to produce seven good ponies in the

morning in addition to the animals he was bringing for my cousin's husband, who was to accompany me for the first four marches, we took a rupee *sahi* from him and hoped for the best.

And so at last, after dinner on the cousins' house-boat, I turned in to dream of the long road and of the unknown that lay beyond.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST MARCHES

I AWOKE to the sound of bustle all around, and, coming out of my tent to the cloudless sunlit morning, found the men busy striking camp, with all the tents save my own already converted to shapeless heaps of canvas on the dew-sprinkled turf. We had four tents, my own 80 lb. one of conventional double fly and ridge-pole pattern, a little single fly 40 lb. tent in which two people can dine provided they don't try to stand up simultaneously, and in which the store boxes lived and Ghani slept, together with two small tents for the men. Vixen and Vagrant were taking the edge off their appetite with the aid of a decayed goat's horn—the goat must have been dead many days—while Dog Bill was digging out a large stone with a series of yelps indicative of the most extreme anguish. One could never keep him in England because the moment the neighbours heard him really happy with a stone, they would set the S.P.C.A. on to one for torturing a dumb animal. I imagine flaying something alive might produce

the same noises as Bill makes when he is really enjoying himself.

I dressed hurriedly for my last breakfast in the civilised comfort of the house-boat under the willows on the opposite bank, and, leaving Habib to see the loads roped up, crossed the bridge to the grass flats where the dwellers at Gandarbal reside. Srinagar is too hot for comfort in the summer months, and those who don't go up into the hills, to the pleasant spaces of the mountain valleys of the fashionable, over-dressed, existence of Gulmarg, take their boats to the upper Sind reaches where the ice water coming down from the melting snowfields and glaciers keeps the temperature down several degrees. The more well-to-do Indian, too, has taken to coming to Kashmir of late years, and since, if he can avoid it, he rarely marches—prosperity has the most demoralising effect on the majority of Orientals—he has adopted the house-boat in large numbers, and Gandarbal is a favourite resort of his.

From the house-boat windows at breakfast we could see the ponies being laden up, and presently they came filing across the bridge, the leading pony's load surmounted by a clothes basket in which sounds of extreme discord indicated the presence of "those people," whose

little legs were quite unsuited to the marches that lay ahead. Since whenever the basket was opened demure silence ensued, I don't know who was the aggressor, but the moment the lid was shut again, pandemonium of worries and snarls broke out until finally the jogging motion of the pony induced sleep. I fancy that at first it was Vixen who began the game, since she is never happy unless her teeth are fixed in something, but, later, I think Vagrant realised the futility of passive resistance and took to active measures.

And so we set out through the chenars and mulberry trees of Gandarbal village, dappled splashes of dark shade and intense sunlight, past little two-storied mud and wood houses with high eaves and thatched roofs whose upper stories—open at the ends—serve as barns for winter storage of fodder and wood, into a shady lane with a rippling water channel leading to the little village of Nunar.

In the Kashmir hills, as along the Indian frontier, in Ladakh, in Baltistan, and in all this corner of Asia where melting snow is the main source of water supply, the irrigation channel is the one thing that renders cultivation, and so life, possible. The swift-falling mountain torrents lend themselves excellently

to the purpose, and everywhere along the rocky banks you may see the little stone-built or earth-dug channels which lead off the water, it may be for several miles, to irrigate some flattish patch among the hills, or some collection of terraced fields clinging precariously to a steep hillside, their presence often shown high above you on a barren mountain by a ribbon of green where the grass grows on the edges, or by the little willows which plant themselves along their banks.

Nunar boasted a village school, and we stood a minute to watch Musalman youth learning its prayers—a score of skull-capped youngsters in the indescribably dirty nightgown-like garment that the Kashmir peasant wears until it falls to bits—squatting on knees and heels chanting the praises of Allah in chorus to the intonation of two similar youths who stood facing them. Later they would turn to lessons, like other youngsters I have seen in the Murree hills, collected from the scattered mountain villages, chanting in chorus the Punjabi equivalent of

> "Twice two are four!
> Twice three are six!"

Needless to say they were boys only, no girls being there.

Another stretch of shady lane between walnut trees, and so to the Wayil bridge, a modern suspension structure over the boulder-filled bed of the Sind river, glaring white in the brilliant sunshine, with a great torrent of rushing grey water sweeping down its centre, and to-day—for the snows were melting fast—washing right up to either bank. And on the bridge the best of notices: "No tongas or motors allowed over this bridge." It was the end of even comparative civilisation, saving only the single line of telegraph that stretches out its thin link another 230 miles to Leh, and there ends.

We tramped across the bridge to the musical clatter of our baggage ponies' hoofs on the swaying woodwork—our faces set to the open road, the end of the motor road behind us, the nearest railway station over 200 miles still further back, and all about us blue-green sweeps of pine-clad hills rising higher and ever higher ahead, under a sky of vivid blue now dotted above the peaks with the little clouds that always collect over high snow as the day warms. And, as if to greet us, from the other side came a long string of laden *tzos*, the half-bred yak, which with the pony, the true yak, and always, of course, the load-carrying man, are the only means of transport for hundreds and hundreds

of miles until you reach the camel of the great Asian deserts. They were a little symbol, those black, low-built, big-barrelled, powerful animals with the long horns and bushy tails—a sign that we had reached the fringe of the good lands where you measure your distance in days' marches instead of miles—so many days to here, so many weeks to there—the lands where life hasn't changed and doesn't change from century to century.

A shortish march this first day, with men and animals' legs still soft, to Kangan, just beyond the mouth of the Wangat valley, where is a large rest house, the only one of its kind till Leh, in a big enclosure of turf dotted with shady trees where we lay and lazed and ate our lunch until the ponies came in. Then we piled our kit into two rooms, while Habib hung about and implored us to be careful of thefts. The Kashmiri is the most timorous person that ever existed and one Punjabi with a stick could terrorise a crowd. Alas for the peace of the burly, broad-shouldered peasants of the Sind valley, a misguided Kashmir administration of the past brought in some Kohistani settlers to the Wangat valley, giving them land in the hope that they might forsake their freebooting ways. As well ask a leopard to refrain from

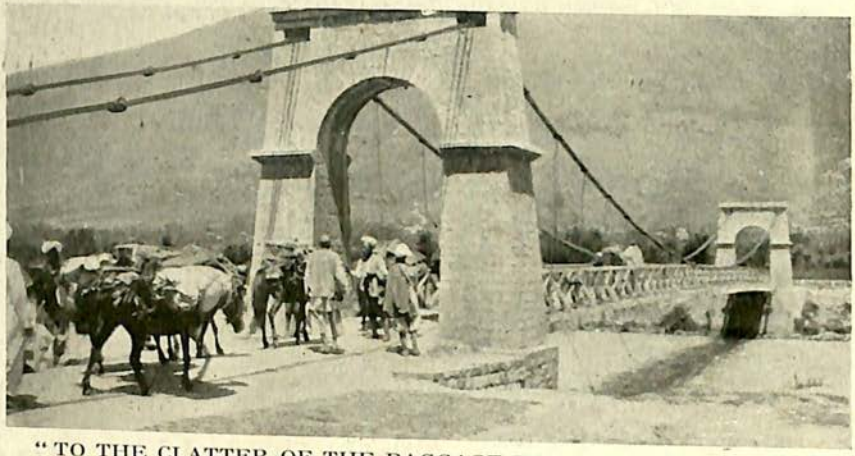
goats as a Pathan from looting in a country like this. So, perhaps, Habib had some grounds for his fears, since what could four able-bodied Kashmiris do against one determined Kohistani thief, possibly armed with a knife?

However, we saw no thieves, unless one included in that category Aziza the cook, a rather red-faced, hook-nosed gentleman of Jewish aspect, as fine a marcher and as willing and hard a worker as I have ever met, and meticulously honest in all things except the matters of tea and sugar, flour, eggs and milk. Fortunately I had laid in a week's reserve and managed to pick up a little more on the road. Otherwise I should have gone hungry on my return journey. The men had their month's food with them—bought at my expense—and I suppose they considered it unnecessary to waste the money I gave them for the purpose on tea and sugar when the sahib had stocks of the same.

And then the things that, according to Aziza, went to the making of bread! Eggs and milk and sugar *ad lib.*! But what was I, a mere man, to do? Bread was the staff of life and there were long marches to be got through, so I silently paid for the extras that theoretically went into it, and envied the more fortunate

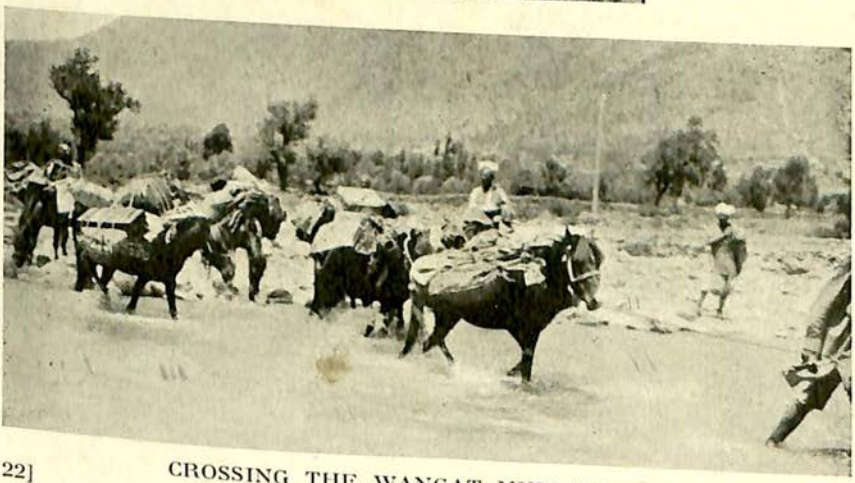
pilgrims who had women with them who understood the mysteries of the kitchen. Still Aziza gave me a portion of the loot, since the bread was certainly tasty, both to me and to a married couple I met whose cook could not rise above soda scones. The lady talked about my delicious "milk bread," so perhaps I was hard on Aziza, who after all with his sheet-iron *tijjal* —a circular metal drum on which he heaped embers—produced delicious little loaves after footing it 20 or 25 miles, helping with the ponies and putting up camp. Furthermore, he was never once sick or sorry in 650 miles of road, whereas I have met other unfortunates out camping whose cooks invariably went sick the moment they talked of moving camp five miles.

Next day we marched to Gund, and this time I sat and watched the ponies being loaded. The pack-saddle of the Sind valley is a most Heath Robinson affair in about eight pieces. First there is a back-cloth, or two, or three, laid on, one after the other; then a little pad tied on to the withers on which rests the bend of a hairpin-shaped affair of straw-packed sacking, some three feet long, the arms of which lie either side of the animal's spine. Over this again two or three more sacking cloths, the



"TO THE CLATTER OF THE BAGGAGE PONIES' HOOFS ON THE SWAYING WOODWORK" (p. 19)
The Wayil Bridge

"THE GREAT GORGE OF GAGANGIR" (p. 26)



CROSSING THE WANGAT NULLAH (p. 20)

whole secured by coarse hairy ropes—a saddle without a bit of wood or leather in it.

This being the second day out, I missed the joyous scramble for light loads which always takes place the first day, for after that custom decrees that loads shall be retained according to the first day's division, unless master or the shikari step in. I have a friend whose great amusement when on trek is to put out his cartridge box at loading time. It is small and inoffensive, but 250 sporting cartridges weigh a good deal more than many larger and more bulky packages, and the face of the individual who secures what appears to be a really light load is a study when he lifts it.

The loads are placed in two pieces of sacking sewn together with sufficient spare to rope round the packages and then just hung across the ponies' backs with an all-over rope to prevent them jolting. Finally the odd pieces—camp lanterns, spare cooking pots, haversacks, etc. etc.—are parcelled out to the pony men, who roll them into a blanket worn plaid-wise, and one is more or less ready to start. We weren't always, because *yeh log* had to be snared into their basket after separating them from the major portion of the filth they always contrived to nose out while everyone was busy packing.

As a general rule I left when loads had been

more or less got ready and forged ahead with Sidika—the tiffin coolie—a functionary whose main business in life was to look after me on the road and shadow me everywhere. One may infringe many customs in the East, as we do—we walk, for instance, whereas no Oriental who could scratch up the sorriest mount would ever dream of trudging it—but you must not walk alone. You must pay a man to walk behind you even if he carries nothing but your walking-stick or an umbrella.

But Sidika carried a great deal more than that. His sturdy little figure was hump-backed with a big rucksack containing the midday meal, the waterproof for possible rain, the sweater for the high, cold places when with sweat-sodden shirt you come over the rise into the wind off the snow, and all about him hung the minor requirements of the road—the map case, the compass, the field glasses, the camera. Sidika with his little black beard, his rather hooked nose, and steady brown eyes, his tireless plod that never altered mile after mile, was as good a specimen of the shikari class as I have ever met. He walked the road with me and climbed the passes, mile to mile, and thousand foot to thousand foot, and carried a load, whereas I didn't.

That day's march took us into Gund in pouring rain, and we were beguiled into occupying two rooms in the serai so as to save the men pitching camp in the rain. Once, but never again! The room was crowded, and they were small, lithe, active, and very hungry. One whole tin of Keating's and two days' march were needed before we got rid of the reminiscences of Gund.

Gund is charming in the fine weather, and I have very pleasant recollections of other trips when the tents were pitched under the great trees on the river bank, and I caught the little snow trout under the great rocks in the sparkling snow water, but that day it was merely a muddy enclosure with puddles of filth, and the river a brown mill-race under the dripping trees. But even that could hardly take away from the grandeur and beauty of the six-thousand-foot wooded slopes that shot up on the opposite banks, ending in high rock crags above the tree line.

In the evening when the rain had stopped and the sun came out a little, we took the dogs for a stroll, and the valley was beautiful with its rich green fields of rice on the right bank, and the wonderful sweeps of sunlit pine and fir on either hand.

We climbed a little knoll to look at our road

of the morrow, to find, of course, that the knoll was a cemetery. Middle Asia always buries its dead on mounds, I don't know why. Perhaps to be nearer Heaven. I have seen it away in Baluchistan, along the frontier, across the passes : little forgotten, forsaken graves with tumbled stones above them and, perhaps, springing wild flowers all about. But it is nicer, really, than the serried order of white tombstones that meet the eye in Europe. I think it is Tacitus who says that savages build their houses apart, but civilised men together. The same might almost be said of graves, and somehow I prefer the savage method.

The weather made amends the following day, and in glorious sunshine we made our way up the valley towards Sonamarg, the pines getting more and more mingled with the great, dark firs as we rose from 7,000 feet to well over 8,000 near the great gorge of Gagangir where the river rounds a precipitous mass of limestone cliff. Up its face—their feet in invisible crannies—hang tall fir trees, hundreds of feet above the stream, which is now a true mountain torrent foaming along in splashes of crystal water between immense grey boulders tossed down by the sliding snow above in winter time, when miles of the valley are snowbound for months.

There were remnants of snow bridges, too; the water—melting in spring after its long winter sleep—cuts its way through under the deep blanket of snow in a tunnel miles long, and then, bit by bit, the snow melts away, leaving arches at the dark, narrow corners, bridges which are more or less constant each year and used to cross the river. But now, on the 2nd August, the arches were all broken, and only the buttresses of snow on either bank remained, masses of frozen snow still many feet thick with well-trodden trails across them.

Then, with the snow came the silver-barked birch trees—the first stragglers from the birch glades of the higher levels. I always rejoice at reaching the birches, for one feels at last that one has got away from the conventionalities of the flats. I love the whispering pines and the great solemn firs, and of all the scents in the world, to me that of pines on a warm day is the most deliriously sweet. But the birch spells the quiet and peace of the high places —the sense of achievement—of height surmounted—of something attained—and, as a rule, they are above the high-water mark of the ordinary ebb and flow of human life. They are the trees of those who know the wanderlust, the trees of the pilgrim souls, for the others

stop down with the oak and the walnut, the apricot and the mulberry, or take motors into the pines, or very rarely venture timidly into the shadows of the firs. And I have never in this, my special corner of the world, seen a motor among the birches, though often among pines, and sometimes in firs. Those who would see birches must come on their own legs, or if unable to walk, must ride the uncomfortable hill ponies over the steep drops, but one way or another they must reach the birches by endeavour and discomfort cheerfully borne.

The Sind valley is wonderfully lovely, and just this month in particular it was thick with wild flowers—a thicker carpet with every step we climbed. It is my regret that I do not know their names, but I know their faces as one gets to know the faces of one's neighbours. Forget-me-not everywhere, anemones, bells of fifty different shapes and hues, little hats for dream princesses, buttercup and clover, dandelion and ragwort, St.-John's-wort and lady's slipper, columbine and Michaelmas daisy, scarlet pimpernel, and a hundred more whose names I've never heard.

And, crowning all, vistas of snow-topped peaks, and long sweeps of snow-filled valleys down almost to the water's edge on the south

side of the river in shade nearly all day. But I think only those who have crossed the passes and known the barren hills of the other side can really appreciate such places as the Kashmir valleys at their true worth, just as only those who have known the sun-scorched plains of India can understand what it means to walk on a springy carpet of flower-strewn turf or lie on a bed of matted pine needles.

And so we came into the long grass stretches that form Sonamarg (the pleasant meadow), now partly veiled under a misty sky and a promise of light rain. Great, rounded, turf-clad hills, with, to our right, the fir slopes of Thajiwas, wherein were hidden the little camps of the summer residents of Sonamarg under the high glaciers which hung above, great snow slopes and long ice falls above the firs almost black in the distance.

Thajiwas has the most beautiful of scenery with its dells of wild flowers just below the snow, and one can understand how it draws people. But there are still more beautiful places in the smaller valleys where you can have a 14,000-foot snow-crowned mountain all to yourself, and from month's end to month's end never see another soul save the wandering shepherds. Some day they will make a motor road to Sona-

marg and Baltal which lies beyond, and so ruin them. But at present they are Kashmir almost at its most beautiful, and that is something to dream of.

We camped outside the little serai so that the men could have better shelter if it rained hard, our tents facing up the valley to the higher hills with, to our left, the dozen little wooden huts with tumbled black plank roofs which make up Sonamarg village, marked from afar by the glistening tin roof of the telegraph office —a little cluster of dwelling-places under the great hills, just a tiny dot of activity and life below the great silences. Sonamarg that night brought back to me once more in a mild way that excellent, chastening feeling of smallness —the sense of true proportion in life, which descends upon one like a charm in the high and the wide and the lone places, the desert, the high hills, or at sea in a small boat by night.

The short march to Baltal next morning was one long succession of grass glades and fir trees under a cloud-flecked azure sky. Vivid green of grass and splash of wild flower everywhere, and never a soul in sight save where, higher up on the hills, a Gujar or two with his flocks could be seen, and once on the road two gaily

clothed, pig-tailed Ladakhis with their ponies going down to Srinagar.

That evening Baltal with its birch glades and flower-strewn slopes, under the enormous limestone crags which shoot up 3,000 feet in front of the little rest house, itself at an altitude of 9,500 feet, was looking its most beautiful, beautiful as it always is, with a wild, fairy loveliness. Northward lay the hills of the Zoji, where we could see our road zigzagging up the steep hillside, or cutting black across the long white snow slides. To south-east the river continued up a still more narrow gorge towards Amarnath —one of the great Hindu pilgrimage places— gaunt snow peaks against an apricot sky above the heavy lilac shadows of the lower hills. The setting sun gave us a promise for the morrow as it lit suddenly upon the high peaks which hung above us to eastward under misty purple clouds, turning the limestone cliffs with their fantastic rifts and crevices into a fairy city with golden walls and turrets above the rose-ivory of the heaped snow beds.

And then came dusk and the stars and the great silence of night in the hills, with only the distant murmur of the rushing ice water to lull us to the sleep of the road.

CHAPTER III

THE ZOJI LA

THE main gate from Kashmir towards Baltistan and Ladakh is the Zoji La, a pass of 11,500 feet some five miles from Baltal. It is the lowest depression for many hundred miles on either side and forms the main trade route between Central Asia and Kashmir. It is not in the least high as Middle Asian passes go—the altitude is that of the town of Leh, and of the Indus river valley above Leh. But it has a tremendous winter snowfall, closed in as it is by the high wooded hills around Baltal on the edge of the monsoon area, and though the Zoji in late summer is a gentle road for elderly maiden aunts, in winter its crossing is either impossible or at best a difficult undertaking fraught often with real danger to life.

The summer road for the first four miles runs in a series of zigzags up the grass slopes north-west and north of Baltal in a steady, easy gradient which takes you from 9,500 feet up to just over 11,000 on a good pony road, six feet wide in places, often cut out of the steep

rock faces, and here and there with real precipitous drops of several hundred feet below, while sometimes even at the end of the summer you cross long snow slides on a foot-wide ledge of dirty, frozen, hoof-marked snow.

But the winter road is the narrow gorge below, which is an Irish way of saying that for these first four miles there is no road at all in winter —the mail runners, walking on the packed snow which may be anything up to a hundred or more feet deep, just follow the ravine until eventually they rise to the three miles or so of open grass land which form the pass proper, for the Zoji is not a perceptible pass like many others where you reach a sharp divide and find a new world spread out below your feet. On the Zoji you go uphill for a time—then you reach what appears to be comparatively level or gently undulating ground—and after a couple of miles suddenly find that the water is running the opposite way—conclusive proof that you have reached the other side.

This undulating grass land where the ravine opens and is joined by the summer road is, of course, only apparent in late summer, and this year most of it was still under snow in August. In the winter it is all one crumpled blanket of

white, with perhaps the tops of the telegraph poles emerging.

All the way from below Sonamarg to beyond Dras—the first large set of villages in the Kargil district—every three or four miles—perhaps a trifle closer on the Zoji itself—you pass little stone shelters which on the pass become regular houses with long, slanting roofs to take the snow. These are the mail runners' huts for the snow months, each occupied by three or four men whose duty it is to pass on the mail bags to the next stage. In the summer they travel somewhat further, going from village to village, marked by their belt and brass badge, and the unmistakable sealed canvas bag with the blue lines, such as you may see at the London termini when the red mail vans come in. Six days from Srinagar to Leh in fine weather, man after man jogging his short stage to the next post where another takes on the burden, and so the mails jolt along at a dog trot through the day and night. I don't know why the summer mails aren't carried by mounted men, but the traditional mail bearer of the East is the footman, and in less civilised parts of India you see him still—just as he is up here beyond even make-believe civilisation; only in India he carries a spear to the neck of which is attached a

set of metal jingles to scare off wild beasts if necessary, and in any case to announce his coming.

All through the winter they keep the mail service running over the Zoji, though the pass is officially closed. Sometimes the runners come to grief and then the mail doesn't get through, and this year my men remarked to me as we crossed a very thick, long snow bed, that there were two mail runners underneath who had not yet melted out, and they are not likely to until next year now, for the snow is late. I admire the mail runners.

There being a lot of snow we decided for an early start so as to get over it while still frozen after the night, for I think of all the heart-breaking performances, plodding through soft, deep snow is the worst. Having lived on a snow-bound hill-top for two winters now, I speak feelingly. The sight of three persevering souls going to office from their bungalow—normally ten minutes' gentle walk—and taking over an hour on the job—breaking trail in turns—manœuvring the ten- and twelve-foot snow-drifts with bath gratings painfully pushed ahead yard by weary yard—may not sound like India, but it is our India of the worst winter days. On the better ones we merely plodded through

a foot or so of soft slush over the frozen snow of the earlier falls below.

This is a digression, for I was at the Zoji, where we had decided on an early start and rose at 4 a.m. in consequence. We might have saved our trouble, because the pony men had turned the animals out to graze on the hillsides during the night, and it was six o'clock before they rounded them up, and after 6.30 before we finally had them ready for loading. But the dawn repaid us as peak after peak about us flamed into gold above the deep shadows of the valley—gold peaks under a cloudless sky over the misty violet and indigo of the lower hills.

The road was good that day, since we had had no rain to make it slippery. One calls it a road, though, of course, it has no surface save mother earth, except where it is cut from solid rock, or else carried over a chasm on unrailed bridges of pine-trunks packed with stones. So rain on the steep places makes slippery going of the schoolroom frog type: "climb two, slide one." But one doesn't always have the consistency of that detestable frog and frequently it is "climb one—slide two, three, or more."

The wild flowers of the passes are even more numerous and beautiful than those of the lower margs. Beside the forget-me-nots and

daisies, anemones and wild Canterbury bells, the Zoji was carpeted with columbine of mauve or mixed mauve and white, tall poker flowers of yellow, and—gem of all—the wild red rose, for a bud of which I negotiated a steep climb down over nothing particular save a snow-bound stream a few hundred feet below. But then a pink rose-bud of the passes is worth a lot in my estimation, since, as my friends point out, I am a little mad. Our Murree hills are crammed in summer with white wild roses, but never there have I met red ones.

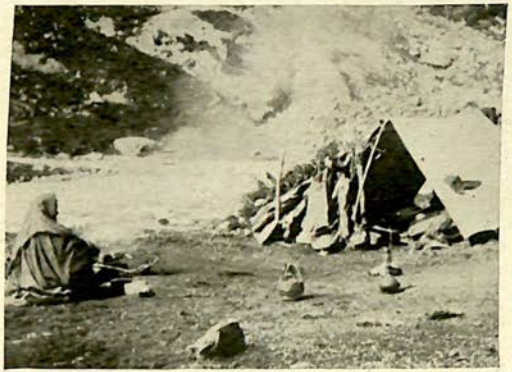
And then suddenly we turned the last steep corner in the shadow of a gorge whose opposite side—rising close on 3,000 feet above the snow-covered stream in the shadows below—must have dropped sheer as a wall for a thousand feet in a straight face of limestone rock. Then, losing sight of the long frozen snow slides we had sidled across, we came out upon the snow-fields with high above us on either hand gaunt rock pinnacles whose feet lay buried in immense beds of snow; long fields of snow between expanses of flower-strewn turf in a winding valley of gentle slopes, where grazed flocks of sheep tended by the Gujars, whose little tents and shelters showed in the lee of big boulders.

Down the centre of the valley ran the Zoji

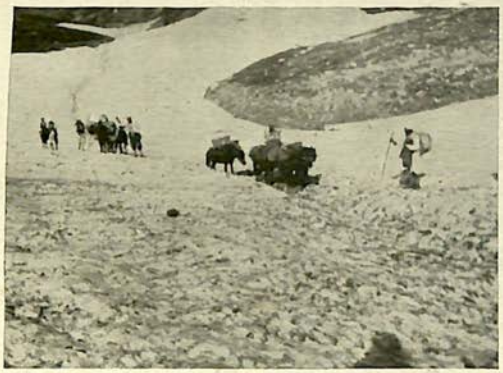
stream, born of the snows about us—a foaming torrent of grey ice water between the banks of snow—losing itself for several hundred yards at a stretch, to vanish swirling into ghostly tunnels under the snow beds, where the snow was packed so thick that no sound of the rushing stream could be heard as we stood above it. At one point where we crossed by a snow bridge, estimating from the slope of the hill and the fall of the water where it reappeared some half a mile again below us, the packed snow we stood on was not less than 60 feet deep this month of August. Small chance for anyone who should slip into one of the gaps where the stream could be heard but not seen. Half a mile of snow would take a lot of moving even with all the resources of civilisation at one's call, and here with but few men and the most primitive of tools the chances of finding man or animal carried well under would be simply nil.

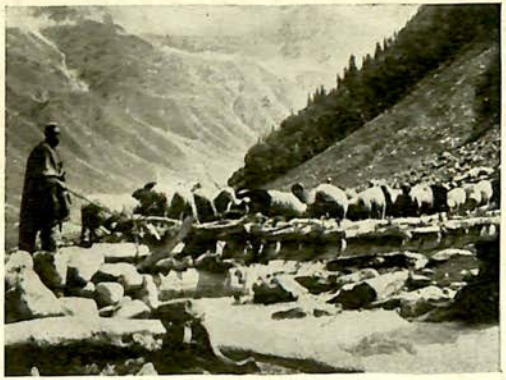
The Gujar—the wild shepherd of the hills—is a nomad whose only home is his little shelter of sackcloth or sometimes part-worn tents filched from Heaven alone knows where. He follows the snow during the summer, and at this time of year he lives with his flocks at an altitude of between 10,000 and 12,000 feet, and everywhere in the Kashmir valleys you find his summer

"PART WORN TENTS FILCHED FROM HEAVEN KNOWS WHERE" (p. 38)



"WE PUSHED ACROSS THE SNOW-FIELDS" (p. 44)





"THE GUJAR . . . THE WILD SHEPHERD OF THE HILLS" (p. 38)

GUJAR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

grazing grounds about that level marked by the flat-roofed open-fronted shelters of birch-trunks built into the sides of the hills or against great rocks. The end of September sees him working down until he reaches the main Jhelum valley, and then he may go still further down to the plains of the Punjab or of the North-West Frontier province, to return again in spring and follow the snow up the hills once more as it melts and discloses the new-grown turf.

Many of them, too, come in from the Kohistan, the lawless patch which lies to the north-west of Kashmir, west of Gilgit, formed partly by the Indus valley before the river debouches into the Punjab plains, and by the highlands to either side, a little Alsatia whereto resort the ne'er-do-wells of the Gilgit Agency on the one hand, and of the Malakand on the other.

The Gujars are a wild and timorous people where strangers are concerned, and hurriedly drive their flocks further up the hills when one approaches, and one has the utmost difficulty in inducing them to sell their animals—the only way of obtaining meat when on trek high up. Why this should be I know not, since although money may be of no use to them in summer, they could use it in the plains in winter.

Their clothes are rough and poor and home-

made, and in consequence the American tourist is sophisticating them very considerably. I have seen the children at their elders' bidding hurriedly fling off their filthy garments—they hardly ever wash—hide them behind a tree or rock, and dash out mother-naked with supplicating palms, shivering energetically the while, to beseech *backsheesh* from the wandering globe-trotter about Sonamarg and similar places. I can picture those same tourists on their return to their homes writing articles and giving lectures on the poor peasant of "India," where the little children go naked. The women, moreover, are sometimes really beautiful in spite of the dirt, with straight features of pure Nordic type, though the men as a whole are not good-looking and in no way to be compared with the fighting classes of the Punjab.

That day there was also a big camp of Dras men, with their *tzos* and ponies grazing on the turf between the snow-fields—northward bound with big bales of merchandise from Srinagar, going up to meet the down-coming Central Asian traders at Leh. The march from Sonamarg to Baltal is very short and in the summer the caravans often push on to Kainpatri, at the head of the Zoji, and so shorten the next day's march to Dras.

My cousin's husband was to leave me on the pass and the men kept on asking me how far the colonel sahib was coming. "Till the water runs the other way," was the invariable reply, and they nodded comprehendingly as a sympathetic doctor might nod to a lunatic's remark. Only a few evenings before, Habib—after his fashion when camp was up—had come and squatted slowly by my chair to talk about everything and nothing—and the conversation had turned on the differences between the Englishman and the Indian.

"The sahib," said Habib reflectively, "has no care for money. But if he desires to see strange things he will spend it without thought. Should he wish to see the place where the sun sets, he will spend all his substance trying to get there. Now the people of Hind or of my country desire only to collect money and spend it not at all."

Rather a truthful comparison. No wonder we seem mad to the Orient's eyes, with our desire to see strange places, to face hardship for no material end save only to reach the place where "the sun sets" or where "the water runs the other way." It is another example of the Anglo-Saxon man's trait of never growing up, this desire to get round the corner in

the hope of some tremendous surprise, some "great adventure" to be found on the other side, a trait that but few Latins, or Slavs, or Mongols, or Dravidians can ever understand.

Habib is an interesting soul in many ways. Among other attainments he is somewhat religious, setting great store by the meticulous observance of Musalman law regarding prayers and professing to be extremely upset when, after the manner of puppies the world over, *yeh log* paw and bite him just about the time of evening prayer, thereby forcing him to go and wash, since the dog is (theoretically) unclean to the fervent follower of the prophet. His religious views bias him somewhat when it comes to describing the habits and customs of the Ladakhi, whom, although I had never seen in his own country, my acquaintanceship so far having been limited to caravans met on the roads, Habib had frequently visited in his journeys with sahibs.

"This is Kufristan," said he to me sententiously one night, waving his hand comprehensively and contemptuously over the hills of Ladakh spread about us in the moonlight. This in English means "the land of the pagan."

"People of evil customs also," he continued,

"for they drink wine and one woman marries many men."

Why the polyandry of the Ladakhi should be evil, and the polygamy of the Muhammadan virtuous, it was, of course, no use discussing. The obvious retort would have been that the latter was the injunction of Muhammad, who was the shadow of God. And when you reach that point in an argument there is nothing further to be said. Which reminds me of an aged Musalman teacher of Urdu with whom I once worked at the language, who held strongly that the fossils in the rocks were put there by the devil in order to delude men into thinking that the world was older than Muhammad had taught.

I often wonder what Habib and his like really believe about ourselves. Probably they explain the upside-downness of the world—with its patent fact that the white man is frequently well off while the follower of the prophet is more often poorish—on the lines of the Persians' consoling reflection. The Persian points out, with what seems faultless logic, that as the Almighty is justice itself, and as undeniably the sahib often displays kindness, generosity, and other virtues which some people describe as "natural," he must get his rewards for them

in this life in order that Allah's justice be manifested, since as an infidel the said sahib is inevitably condemned to eternal torment. A simple and easy line of thought and not confined to the Orient or to Islam, for I have met it also in Europe, the classes of people described in the argument being altered to meet the speaker's particular belief.

To return once more to the Zoji, from which I am everlastingly digressing. We pushed across the snow-fields, feeling at each new rise that surely we must have crossed the divide, only to find the water ahead still running back under our feet. Then at last, without any warning, from the least little bank of snow we saw a stream flowing away from us. We had reached the top of the pass, but we had to go another mile for the first view of the bare peaks of Baltistan which my companion desired.

Then, stopping the ponies, we had a meal sitting on a slope of turf that seemed to have more wild flowers than grass blades to the square foot, and *yeh log* were loosed from their basket to chase each other on the springy turf and muddy their little paws on the edges of the fast-flowing streams. Behind us great banks of clouds were working up over the peaks and shadowing the grove of twisted white birches—

the last wild trees I was likely to see for many a long day—so the colonel reluctantly got to his feet and called for his riding pony.

With the colonel and his man disappearing between the snow-fields behind, I picked up my khudstick and set off down the now definite incline ahead along the bank of the Gumru nullah—a torrent of grey ice water between long sweeps of snow and the broken abutments of snow bridges. And then in time I came to Macchoi, which the half-dozen inhabitants and my own following insist on calling *Mitsahoi* (the home of dust) because the wind never stops blowing there, and when it isn't buried under snow, it is smothered in dust from the bare hills round. The trees end at the Zoji, and thereafter, with an exception or two to prove the rule, there are no trees save those planted in the villages—poplars, willows, and fruit trees.

Macchoi is the winter and spring halting-place when animals cannot cross the pass, and everything has to be carried by coolies. It is less frequently used in summer, though some people, India bound, prefer to make their halt there and then march straight to Sonamarg, missing Baltal.

The little serai had had its three end rooms knocked down by the winter snow and they had not yet started rebuilding, but the two-roomed

rest house on the ridge above was intact—its double-shuttered windows, such as one finds also at Matayan and Dras, speaking to the violence of the winter and the howling Zoji gale that cuts like a whip-lash and seems never to cease.

Macchoi is bleak enough in summer, but in winter the combination of heavy snow and the Zoji gale must make it a very fair imitation of a Buddhist cold hell. Above it to the south-east is a narrow valley packed with ice, glacier and crumpled *séracs*, brown ice, green ice, grey ice, and above that white snow beds running up to a sharp-toothed peak of 17,000 feet, which forms a landmark for some way owing to its distinctive shape and great snow beds.

As I sat on the ridge of Mitsahoi I saw winding up the steep path below me three ponies, on one of which I recognised the figure of a Muhammadan veterinary assistant whom we had met at the other stages. He had just been transferred from Jummu to Leh, and was cheerfully taking the road for the best part of 500 miles to take up his new post. He rode the leading pony with his three-year-old son on the saddle-bow, the rest of the pony hidden under bundles of bedding and gear. Behind him on another diminutive animal equally laden came

his wife, sheeted and shrouded in her burkha with the latticed eyepieces, and at her saddle-bow her small daughter of some seven years, unveiled, of course, being not yet of marriageable age. On the third pony, hung about with cooking pots and sacks of coarse country flour and other foodstuffs for the road, came his servant—probably a distant connection—carrying the third child—also a girl—at the peak of his saddle, while alongside walked the Dras man who owned the string of ponies.

As he passed the time of day to me later, I felt rather ashamed of my seven ponies and my five men—I who was merely globe-trotting, while he with his three beasts was moving his home for three years to a foreign country, to live among a people of whose language and customs he had no knowledge. And yet I suppose, compared with Western standards, I had with me only the bare minimum of necessities. I sometimes think it would do many of us no end of good if we were given half a dozen ponies and told to march for six months. We'd find such a lot of necessaries of daily life were in reality pure luxuries.

Our own ponies having now arrived, we turned our backs on Macchoi, and leaving the veterinary assistant and his family squatting to the midday

meal, the lady eating furtively under her burkha, we climbed the little ridge ahead of the rest house and saw before us, down a long incline of stony grass land, the widening valley of the Gumru, with never a sign of house or tree to break the bareness of the landscape under the towering hills.

Kashmir the pleasant lay over the snows behind and we were now in typical Middle Asian country, the invariable type that, with but few exceptions, lies beyond the Indus; immense rocky hills towering up on all sides, topped here and there by snow, long sweeps of boulder-strewn slopes, and the air about us of an amazing clarity that deceives one hopelessly as regards distances, until experience and the heart-breaking truth borne home at the end of long marches teach one to quadruple every estimate one makes.

It was Baluchistan again, with the marvellous, unpaintable colours that the sun flings into bare rock and stone, colours quite other than the soft shades of the more fertile lands, but colours of a softness and translucence impossible to depict in any medium save the most perfect of water colours. As I swung down the long descent it seemed hard to believe that we were hundreds of miles away from the Baluch hills.

One little spot of life showed where we crossed a tributary of the Gumru by the usual bridge of two rough tree-trunks on crude stone piers above the racing ice water. On the near side lay a little meadow in which was pitched a weather-worn tent, piled with the rough saddlery of the country and flanked with ration sacks. It was the summer residence of a very minor official of sorts whose business was the supervision of certain state ponies whose breeding and feeding grounds were the grass-dotted hillsides about us, where the occasional turf stretches made splashes of green against the brown and red of the naked rock.

Some seven miles more of the valley saw us in sight of Matayan, set in a rather wider sweep of valley among a few irrigated fields, with not even a tree to form a contrast to the skeleton line of telegraph poles that for two hundred odd miles mark the road to Leh. The first glimpse of Matayan was the long sloping roof of the rest house, the usual snow breakwater type of roof that slants almost to the ground on the side of the prevailing wind.

A little nearer, and then what had seemed to be a tiny eminence of the stony soil resolved itself into the village, a huddle of stone buildings in no case more than six feet high, utterly

windowless, each with only one tiny door facing down the valley, doors of between three and four feet high. The village clung to the ground as though afraid of being swept away by the howling gale that played about it and us, the unceasing Zoji gale from the snows behind. The rough unmortared stone huts had exactly the appearance of men clinging to scant cover before a heavy machine-gun barrage, cowering as low as they can get. And the absence of windows called up the winter souvenirs, when the valley is snow-bound and life consists of weeks in one tiny room huddled round a smoky fire in the centre, sleeping, eating, and sometimes talking. It is not surprising that the Purig-pa is slow in his movements and dull in his wits.

The rest house was undergoing annual repairs and the two little rooms were heaped with piles of wet mud—the bricks and mortar of the East. But the chokidar—a voluble and unwashed Purig-pa—said that all would be well if the "protector of the poor" would repose himself without for a space. A rickety deck chair was hurriedly produced and the "protector of the poor" made thereof a shelter under which he and Dog Bill partook of the remains of the lunch basket and the thermos. Everything was grit, and the tea turned to mud from the

sand-laden wind that howled past as one drank it, so that it was a pleasant relief when the slit-eyed chokidar announced with beaming face that all was prepared and the dwelling was now ready for occupation. I followed him in, and indeed, the mud-heaps had been swept out, and only the damp patches on the floor marked their original existence in the gloomy little heavily shuttered room, where there was no wind, an almost uncanny stillness after the air outside. I think of all the wayside rest houses I have met, Matayan is the most utterly desolate, but just then it was a haven of shelter, and when the ponies came in and the kit was off-loaded, my camp bed run up, and the dogs' blankets spread on the earthen floor, it seemed almost homelike with its rickety table and patched looking-glass, its decrepit chairs and battered tin bath. It was so homelike that I felt impelled to labour, and got out writing materials for the brief hour remaining before dark came on, and so got my diary up to date.

Later, I stood outside for a while, muffled against the cold wind, and considered again the bleakness of this absurd little attempt at human life under the gaunt rock cliffs, the snows faintly visible in the moonlight, and overhead clusters of stars such as one only sees in the high places,

stars that you can almost touch, so close they seem in the thin air. The glass-topped door of my room threw a splash of yellow light on to the velvet shadows without—the second room was occupied by the veterinary family, and every chink was, of course, blocked up—*more indianico*. The village was invisible save just where, on its edge, a faint star of light marked the door of the serai, filled with the less affluent pilgrims of the road, pony men and traders from the odd corners of this desolate land.

And once again I felt small and proper-sized in relation to the whole scheme of things and of time—just an atom like the sand grains that drifted down the wind as it passed—a good and wholesome feeling for any man. Then I went to bed, and the thought of the slit-eyed, Mongolian-featured chokidar, with his incessant "protector of the poor," recurred to me. That ancient Eastern title of the ruling class is rather an epitome of the British mission in the Indian Empire. That is just what we are in India for—to protect the incoherent and shiftless mass of 299 odd million "poor" against the oppression of the over-voluble few hundred thousand who can read and write and, above all, talk and make money, and a few hundred thousand more men with wolves' instincts who live along the border

and can neither read nor write and whose only known method of making money is the use of the grey steel and the bullet to take what they desire. The term "poor" is applied to themselves in daily speech by all classes of Indian peasantry, all those dependent for food and shelter and life on their little fields, their scanty cattle, their daily labour, but the cream of India for all that they cannot read the papers and have never seen a "movie."

And so, comforted with the reflection that even a very small atom of windswept sand can sometimes do something to help to make a better world, I went to sleep in luxury of warm blankets with grateful recollections of Aziza's really hot, thick soup and tasty, if somewhat gritty, chicken rissoles, and still more grateful thanks to the Providence who makes small dogs to be companions of men in lonely places. This last reflection was produced by a little white figure that emerged from its basket to thrust a cold, wet nose into my hand and nearly wag its tail off in its endeavours to express its pleasure at Master being there. I suppose in doggy language Vagrant also was saying "*Gharib Parwar*"—"Protector of the poor."

CHAPTER IV

THE DRAS VALLEY

I SET out from Matayan next morning with some pleasure, for besides the fact that in daylight the rest house was desolate in the extreme, the march ahead led into more populated country, inhabited to some extent by the most interesting people I have seen in my wanderings—the Dards, an Aryan survival washed up into this hill-locked corner of Middle Asia—women with sun bonnets and Nordic features, and children with little queer toques and cheeks (rosy under the dirt) that would pass muster in any English village.

The going was good, and Sidika and I—preceded by Dog Bill—swung briskly along by the foaming torrent of the Gumru until in the course of time we came to the wooden cantilever bridge at the little village of Pindras and saw the early risers from the village—women with their gaily embroidered poke bonnets and their red sashes over their smocks—setting out to work in the fields. When one has been many years in the East it is pleasant to see a people

"GAILY EMBROIDERED POKE BONNETS" (p. 54)
Dard women near Dras.

GROUP OF BROKPAS NEAR DRAS

DRAS PONY MEN AT THE MIDDAY HALT

wearing clothes that recall the old English shires.

Pindras is of note, for there are to be seen the first trees since the other side of the Zoji —only a tiny plantation of willows it is true, watered by a small irrigation channel and clearly planted and maintained by the hand of officialdom—but nevertheless trees, a pleasant spot of verdure in a landscape which otherwise, save for the fields of waving barley, is made up for the most part of barren rock.

About Pindras it gets more than ever like Baluchistan, great bare hills alternating with fantastic pinnacles of naked rock of reddish colour, flecked here and there with the white of snow, at whose feet the Gumru runs in a sword-cut defile.

Here the colour of the Gumru stream changes from the whitish grey tinge which it has hitherto held and for some reason takes on a thick, dark grey hue, almost that of sand-laden sea-water, a colour which persists all the way until long after joining the Dras river the joint streams eventually lose themselves in the swift torrent of the Suru.

Pindras is more pretentious by far than Matayan, and although the houses are the same low stone-built structures, they sometimes boast

windows, though doors and windows alike still face invariably eastward to escape the terrible western gales from the pass behind. They are warmer in tinge, too, and somehow give one the idea of being more alive than the huts of Matayan, which are seemingly crushed flat to the ground by the force of the wind.

Our road led onward again—now on the left bank—through long ravines where the river, confined between the rock walls, had cut its way down and foamed along over a series of ledges, dropping seven and eight feet at a time and boiling in eddies in the rock pools sheer below our feet, where the road swung round ledges cut in projecting spurs—a narrow track hewn out of the rock, giving just room enough for a laden beast to pass and guiltless of hand rail for the weak-headed.

On our right lay one long succession of fantastic rock hills, cleft into every conceivable shape, whose height towered above our own insignificant 10,000 feet. One nameless mountain in particular, shaped like a couchant lion with mane of snow, fascinated me that day, and I was at some pains to identify it with protractor and compass—not too easy a matter in that tangle of hills, most of which were over 16,000 feet high. At last we turned a corner and came

into a wider valley, at the end of which opened out the long plain of Dras—vista of irrigated fields and numerous small villages—and striking across country for half a mile or so, came upon the Dras river, spanned with just such another bridge as at Pindras.

It was a good bridge in parts, and by keeping one foot above each of the two tree-trunks that formed its main portion, and dodging the stones with which some of the holes in the planking were filled, we crossed without incident. When the little planks which form the footway wear or break away, the local habit is to get a stone larger than the hole and so cover it. There is no idea of repairing the bridge thereby, the sole object is to prevent animals putting their feet through, since they naturally avoid such large and conspicuous obstacles as great white stones.

Then, climbing up the steep bank opposite, I sat in the shade of a big rock, ate a frugal lunch, and played with my maps. I always like entering a halting place reasonably fresh, and there was much to do in Dras. I expected letters from Leh in the first place, and secondly, new ponies had to be obtained, for those I had got at Gandarbal would come no further.

The little post office lay at one corner of a

willow-shaded garden, and the postmaster hurried out to meet me. Visitors are an event in those parts, and I could see the sorrow spread over his face when I told him that I should not be stopping there, and no more mail would come for me. Near to the post office lies the telegraph office, which functions daily from twelve to three, and consists of one small room, the greater part of which is taken up by easel and painting material, for the telegraph operator—a Hindu of Jummu—is an artist, and supplements his pay by doing oil portraits from photos. The one he was engaged on when I entered that day was a life-size head and shoulders of a Hindu merchant, whom he explained that he had never seen, but who had sent up his photo and would call that way for the picture in a few months' time. One can't quite imagine such a thing in England as a telegraph office in the corner of a studio. And the contrast between the easel, palette, and tubes of Windsor and Newton and the wild scenery around, and the wilder-looking men about, was more than striking.

Sitting outside the rest house just after my ponies arrived, from over the brow of the hill ahead I saw descending a single pony bearing an unmistakable figure that hardly required the glasses to place it. The dilapidated umbrella,

the oversized sun helmet, the baggy-kneed slacks, the tin kettle hung at the saddle-bow, and the complete absence of retinue showed clearly the itinerant missionary of the story books of one's youth.

He got off his miniature beast all of a piece, with the stiffness of one who has ridden many miles, furled his broken-ribbed umbrella, and responded to my greeting. Now in the better parts of the earth like this, there are but few rules of the road, but the first and greatest is that if your party has arrived and been installed either in rest house or tent, and another party appears, all that you have is at their disposal until their baggage arrives. This is as the laws of the Medes and Persians. You may go unshaven or not wash behind the ears, but you must offer hospitality.

My missionary, who was in no way like the missionaries of the Moravian church—good, practical men, who can play the Martha part as well as the Mary one—was evidently one of those who consider that no spiritual good can be achieved without bodily discomfort, for he was travelling light with his scanty baggage miles behind and apparently no servant, so I presume he cooked for himself. He was also ignorant of the language, for his real mission

lay somewhere in India, but his idea of a holiday was to preach the Word in Baltistan, without, however, being able to converse with the local inhabitants save through an interpreter. Being of a practical turn of mind myself—doubtless due to what people call my materialistic outlook —I thought he was perhaps wasting his time preaching to ignorant folk in a language they did not understand, though being naturally polite I refrained from saying so. Also he was earnest, and breathed a rapt, other-world air, and I judged him of the stuff of which martyrs are made, for he ate with a detached air, as though the taking of food was a futile though necessary proceeding. I suppose there's a lot of truth in the adage that it takes all sorts to make a world, but I found conversation difficult with one who seemed to take so little interest in things mundane.

Contemplating Vixen and Vagrant during the afternoon, I decided that a bath was more than necessary; not that the effect is in the least lasting, for the moment the process is over they dash for the nearest heap of dirt and roll in it, just as children, when their nails have been cut, bolt off to scrabble in the flower-beds to take away the " woolly " feeling in their finger tips.

Ghani was engaged in washing my clothes in the stream behind the rest house, and finding another spot where a lot of boulders held the stream back a little, I washed the three dogs, and their towels and blanket thereafter, to the intense joy of some of the local population who gathered in a little group to watch the weird sight, which must have been incomprehensible to them. I think it is Neve who says that the Balti and the Ladakhi refrain from ablutions in the winter from cold, but in the summer from choice, and what they made of a sahib on his knees on the river-bank washing dogs, I really hesitate even to guess. It was a laborious task, because every time I let go the soap it whirled off down stream, and had to be chased over the stones, and then, of course, *yeh log* seized the opportunity to roll in the mud again in frantic endeavour to replace such filth as I had removed.

However, at last it was over, and with three really white dogs I sallied out for an evening stroll, Sidika with a large stick behind me to deal with such village dogs as might take too much interest in the puppies, for the Balti dog is large and wolf-like, though not so powerful as the Thibetan dogs of the Chung Cheng Mo beyond Leh, which stand as high as St. Bernards, and are even more stoutly built.

I dropped into the serai on the way to make sure that my ponies would be ready for the morning, and spent a long time trying to get a light for my cigarette with a *chak mak*, the steel-and-tinder outfit that most of the Baltis and Ladakhis carry hung at their waists—a rounded blade of steel, on the upper part of which is worked an ornamented leather purse holding the tinder, and a few little pieces of flint, the whole secured to the person by a long chain. My efforts were vain, but I suppose there is some special knack in it, for the owner got the tinder glowing quite nicely in about three "strikes." The *chak mak* is picturesque, but I think I prefer the match, even when it is the Japanese article, which swamps India nowadays, retailed at the same price as the reliable Swedish one, but favoured, I suppose, firstly, since the Jap adorns the boxes with pictures of Hindu gods, or political heroes, suitable packets for each denomination, and secondly, since he under-sells Europe in the wholesale market, and so the Indian can support the Orient and at the same time save money.

We finished our evening exercise by strolling on to the old ruined Dogra fort which stands near the junction of the Dras and Gumru rivers —a dilapidated mud relic of the days when the

Dogras first took Baltistan, now entirely deserted and slowly disintegrating. And so back to the rest house, and the missionary, and a somewhat gloomy meal by candle light.

A perfect sunlit morning next day saw us on the road again, through long stretches of green fields and unceasing irrigation channels —the chief of which seemed to be the road itself, which ran in a slight fold of the ground and served excellently as a water conduit.

Habib accompanied me to-day—as usual carrying my umbrella to shade his swarthy features from the sun. Having arrived at the sere and yellow leaf of age, I carry two things on trek that fiery youth would scorn, to wit, a hot-water bottle, and an umbrella for rainy evenings in camp. One can find a hundred uses for the last article, and often have I seen Aziza the cook squatting by his little smoky wood fire in the rain, stirring the soup or mangling the chicken under cover of that "brolly."

Habib was conversationally inclined that morning and regaled me with a good deal of information—often of somewhat doubtful veracity—concerning the country-side. Item, it was largely inhabited by Jinns. For the benefit of those who don't know much about Islamic beliefs, I may explain that there are said to be several

classes of beings in the universe. Besides Men and Angels and Devils and Fairies there are also Jinns, who are anterior to men, but differ in not being immortal. On the other hand, they are longer lived, since they last until the Day of Judgment.

They are sometimes jealous of humans since the latter have souls and they haven't, and some of them are rather elf-like in their tricks. Their habitats are wild places, and large settlements of human beings drive them away, rather as the numerous Indians who come to the lower and more pleasant river valley of Kashmir now push the European into the wilder, higher, and less accessible tracts. In fact the white man and the Jinn have a lot in common.

The latter rather score in being invisible and in possessing the power of being able to materialise themselves into any desired shape, such as sheep or hens—a favourite disguise—dogs and so forth, or as voices from the rocks and trees to annoy and terrify lonely wayfarers. The day we marched to Baltal, Ghani, stiff from the unwonted exercise of the previous two days, fell by the roadside and lay in the shade of a birch glade for an hour or so, arriving long after the rest of us, and in a very bad temper, which ended in a scuffle with the cook over the matter

of some food. This outburst was charitably ascribed by Habib to the fact that the Baltal birch glades are very Jinn-haunted, and to sleep in them is to court subsequent troubles.

I was sorry to hear that Jinns were now getting less common in Kashmir and Baltistan than they were in Habib's father's time, owing to the greater peace of the country and the consequent growth of population, for I have a sneaking liking for the Jinn, who must often be rather lonely and is—according to the folk-lore of Islam—a very obedient servant of his Maker, although he has no soul. Perhaps he has one really, only he hasn't been told about it, and so has escaped the lack of sympathy with others which occasionally overtakes those who are too deeply imbued with the importance of their own particular souls.

From Jinns we passed to the discussion of Bhots, which is Habib's generic term for everyone across the Zoji. The word really means the Buddhist Thibetans, but is loosely applied by the Kashmiri to the Purig-pas, who are entirely Mongolian but Musalman by faith. "Nāmi Musalman" according to Habib, which means followers of the faith in name only. In other words, they do lots of things which he doesn't approve of.

They are Shias, whereas the Dards who live among them are Sunnis, the same as are most of the Muhammadans of India and the adjoining countries, and the love of Shia for Sunni is only to be compared with the undying affection of the Irish Catholic for the Presbyterian Ulsterman, while as for the things the Sunni says about the Shia, and the way in which he will joyfully use fire and sword and stone to deal with him in the good, free, Oriental countries recalls Europe of several hundred years ago, before that essentially Christian virtue—tolerance—reappeared on the horizon. I think, according to the good Sunni, the Shia has an even deeper place in hell than the Christian, since the Christian is at least not a Musalman, and so his crimes can never be so great as those of the "Nāmi Musalman."

The Brokpas—the Dards—whom one finds scattered about the Dras valley, belong more properly, like the Jinns and the white men, to the wilder places. They are clearly a true Nordic race, which explains it. The Mongolian invasions have driven the survivors of them up into the less-favoured spots, and, of course, like all Nordic races, they seek cold. But here you find them mixed up with the Mongolian population in the same village, but with separate

fields, and in one you see a party of slit-eyed, squat-nosed Balti ladies in little pork-pie caps and braided tresses, dark homespun tunics and tight trousers, tunic and cap adorned sometimes with tinsel ornaments, garnering the grain, while the next field will be occupied by half a dozen straight-featured Dard women in smock and sun-bonnet, who give one the impression of an old corner of Kent.

The Dards here were clearly a free lot, because I got photos without trouble, whereas nothing would tempt the Balti women within even hailing distance. They seemed to have Orient indelibly marked upon them—anyway, just in this corner. Of course, the complete traveller would always have wife or sister to tackle the women.

After seven miles or so of fertile valley the rocky hills suddenly closed in, in a narrow defile, at whose mouth we halted for the morning meal. As a rule the Oriental, like the Latin, has only two main meals in the day—one somewhere about eleven, and the other at night—so a long halt is really essential for them, since they start their march on just a mug of tea. I always like those wayside halts—made invariably where there is water—both for men and animals to drink, and for most of the men

to wash their hands before eating, according to Musalman precept. The puppies are loosed from their basket—an occasion of great excitement to their little souls—while the ponies snatch what scanty grazing is to be found; and altogether they are rather pleasant half-hours as one lies in the shade of a rock by a brawling water channel or a rock pool in a thirsty land.

Then for eight miles we followed a stony defile bare of the least sign of life—if you except the red-throated lizards who scuttled among the rocks, chased fruitlessly by Dog Bill. He caught one in the end—it must have been asleep—and from the wry expression of his face afterwards, I concluded that it was not good eating, and he was not so keen about them afterwards.

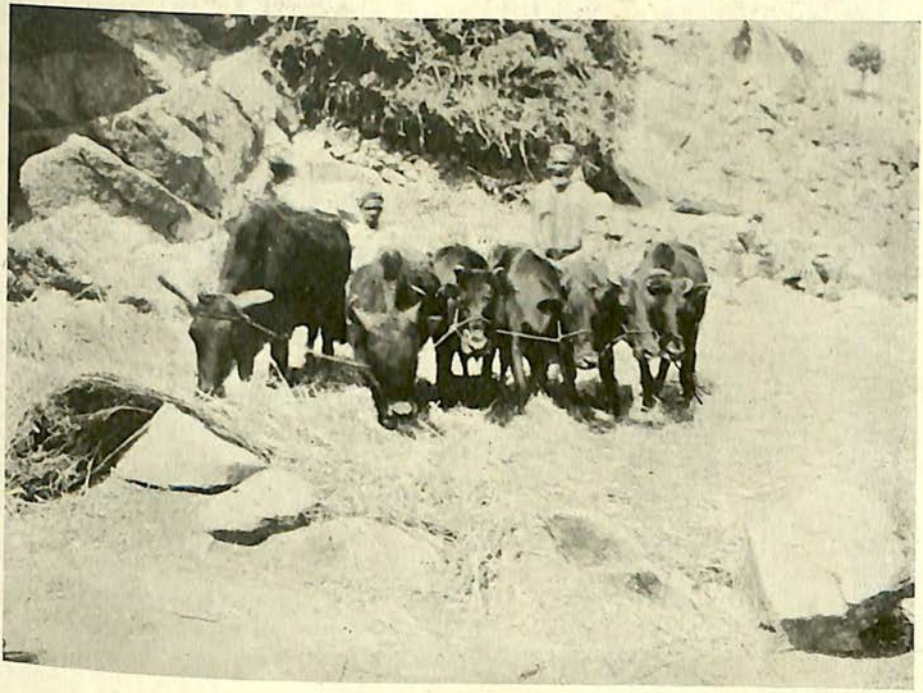
One little oasis of green among the naked rock relieved the monotony of the next fifteen miles. The tiny hamlet of Tashgaom was emerald green in the bright sunshine—fields of waving grain and a willow plantation carpeted with rich turf which formed a halting place for the traveller—occupied that morning by a party of Kargil men and their ponies. And then, again, nothing but stone and naked rock, gemmed occasionally by a rare wild rose bush,

until late in the afternoon we came over a sudden rise, and left the torrent we had followed all day to drop down on the rest house and serai of Shimsha Kharbu, pleasantly shaded with willows—quite one of the biggest plantations on the road. And there we gladly halted for the night on a little strip of level ground, hung above the rushing river and overhung by thousands of feet of jagged mountain, sharp-toothed against the golden evening sky.

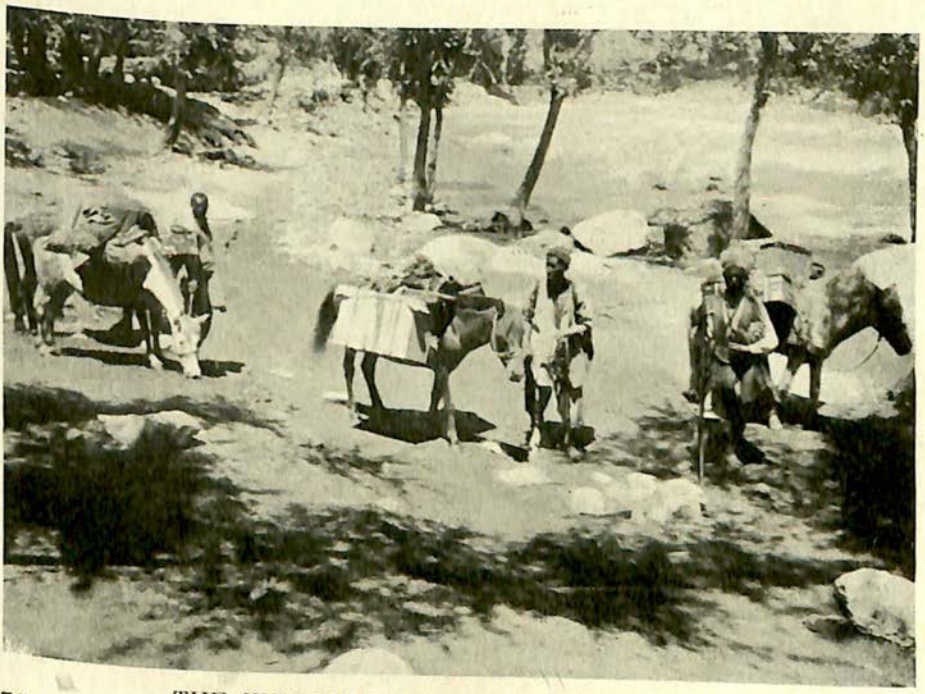
CHAPTER V

KARGIL

THE morning following we took the road again —making our way over the steep spurs that lie on either side of the Dras river—rising and falling continuously all the way to the junction of the Dras and Suru rivers, near the entrance to the wider valley of Kargil. The rough road swung up and down—now 50 feet or less above the foaming river—now 800 feet or more over a steep ridge. And always the same arid hills, void of trees, but rendered somewhat gracious none the less by the tiny rock plants and the little wild flowerets. I think it is most of all in this class of country that one realises the existence of a personal Creator who sets His hall-mark of something really beautiful upon even the least beautiful of His works. It is just what the old-world workman used to do in the days before men became civilised in the sense they are to-day, when manufactures have become mechanical and a man's sole part in the making of anything is perhaps the driving of one nail in one spot in one thousand motor-



TREADING OUT THE CORN (p. 72)
Chanegund.



THE WILLOW GROVES OF KARGIL (p. 75)

cars of sealed pattern daily. The mediæval craftsman used to put on to the work of his hands some piece of art that served no practical purpose, the rune on the sword blade, the figure-head on the ship; something, preferably taken from life, to mark the fact that it was his work, that something of his own living personality had gone forth into the cold steel, or the dead wood. At least, that is what I always feel about the little flowers on the naked hills.

On this march, too, we came upon quaint rock carvings, Heaven knows how many centuries old, rough scratching of ibex and markhor and other horned game, for all the world like the pictures one sees in the illustrated papers when some scientist finds a new hoard of debris from the old stone ages.

After a good many hot and dusty miles we came out among little terraced fields, and high above us, on the arid hillsides, saw the green ribbons of water channels—the fringe of the villages of Chanegund—and, passing among a few ramshackle stone huts, walked over a threshing-floor, where an aged man was urging round in an unceasing circle a string of cattle, bound side by side, to tread out the grain. And one realised once more how necessary is some Eastern experience to understand Biblical references.

"Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn." The little mountain oxen, hardly bigger than big English sheep, and their companion, the solitary half-bred black yak, were unmuzzled as they plodded patiently round on their monotonous task.

Dog Bill, severely overcome by the heat which radiated off rock and stone and hot sand, spent the time in hiding under the shadiest rocks he could find—tail well between his legs and a yard of pink tongue hanging out. When we had gone on sufficiently far to make him feel he might lose us if he didn't hurry, he would bolt out of his shelter to tear after us, fly madly past, and take up a new position under another rock further ahead, only to repeat the performance after we had passed once more.

One other group of figures broke the solitude of the desolate landscape—two ponies, on one of which rode a lean, dark Sikh, with an enormous *kirpan*. The *kirpan*—one of the traditional weapons of the Sikh, which in old days was merely a tiny dagger, is an emblem. After the war the Government, seeking round for tokens to reward the loyalty of that portion of peasantry who fought and died on half a dozen fronts with the best of the Empire's forces, allowed all Sikhs to carry a *kirpan* at

all times. As a result, the agitator has now at his beck and call large numbers of armed men, which is doubtless pleasant for the policeman with the truncheon. The Sikhs who notably don't carry it are the soldiers and ex-soldiers. It is an admirable emblem of our peaceful politics, both the weapon itself and the comparison of the people who do, or do not, wear it.

This Sikh had an outsize weapon in gaudy scabbard, very like the scimitar which Bluebeard carries in the pantomime. He also had a wife, a veiled lady who rode the other pony, and who I discovered later, through the medium of my men, was a Ladakhi whom he had married and whom he had just taken down to Srinagar to be received into Sikhism—for that militant religion is free of the birth shackles of its parent Hinduism, and one is not born a Sikh any more than one is born a Christian. You have to be officially received into the faith.

However, this wandering merchant—one of three cousins settled in Kargil this last twelve years—was not politically minded. On the contrary, despite his enormous weapon, he was quite friendly, and greeted me as a friend and a brother in a foreign land. I gathered that he was doing well, and fleecing the ignorant

Thibetan right nobly—for next to fighting the Sikh's greatest skill lies in making money.

Twice we passed little wayside groups of travellers, pony men bound for Dras or going the same way as ourselves. It was the midday halt, and they were eating by their animals, and drinking buttered tea, the staple food of the country-side—tea stewed with butter, and churned in the long cylinders which the men carry on their backs until it is of the thickness —and taste—of soup. That, and raw barley meal, is their diet, the latter being eaten with the fingers, of course, from the little wooden bowls that every man carries in the bosom of his loose robe—a few drops of water being poured in from time to time to make a paste. The bowls mostly come from Lhassa way, and are the more valued as they are the older and darker in colour, while some are lined with thin beaten silver.

And so at last—in the white, hot sunshine—we came to the rocky point where the dark waters of the Dras river sweep down into the clear, foaming rapids of the Suru, and just before the junction, passed the modern suspension bridge which joins the Dras road to the Skardu one.

Another mile over steep rock and then, spread

out before us, mile after mile of green, lay the willow and apricot groves of Kargil, which is the capital of Purig, whose inhabitants are for the most part Thibetans converted to Islam.

It was pleasant to lie by a rippling water channel on a stretch of emerald turf under the graceful willows, after many miles of marching over bare hills, and complete and utter laziness overcame me after I had eaten and lay waiting the arrival of the ponies. One day's halt in seven is the rule of the road—and here was the eighth day and no halt. Moreover, I had covered every mile on foot. Time precluded a halt, and so the little devils of ease and comfort and slackness explored " avenues " as politicians sometimes say when they have made up their mind to do something they know they ought not to, but are too afraid of the electorate to stick to principles.

The result of their explorations was a growing inclination to ride next day instead of walking —a compromise for the halt I could not afford. Moreover, as the little demons pointed out, we should enter Buddhist country next morning, and that to me was new, so there would be much of interest, surely better studied from the back of a pony than from the ground and with

tired legs. Also it would be a twenty-three-mile march, which is comparatively long.

And so with distinct loss of pride, but considerable inward rejoicing, I told Sidika to order two extra ponies for the next day, so that all of us might ride in turn and thus reduce the actual footwork by a quarter.

Time drawing on, and the baggage ponies having caught up, we pushed on, and after a mile of cultivation entered the little bazaar of Kargil—one single hilly street of tiny wooden shops—heavily shuttered for the most part—since according to Habib it was a Shia holiday. Kargil is a wonderful place, with its enormous emporiums where they really sell things—the only shops for a hundred miles around. In the little booths, hardly bigger than bathing-machines, and considerably more draughty, you can buy matches and kerosine oil, cotton cloth of Bombay and Manchester, sugar and tea of sorts, and wondrous cheap glass and tinsel ornaments. I think there must be some excitement in the Purig villages when Father makes his annual visit to Kargil, with some small coins knotted up in his waist cloth.

Even to us—new come from civilisation—there was a fascination about the shops of Kargil. No sooner had we off-loaded and eaten than

the whole party disappeared as one man to the bazaar, and later I followed them. I often wonder what the attraction of shops is—but there is no denying its existence as a powerful force. A good lady was once telling me of the horrors of life on the Indian frontier—she came from a little station where we who were further on into the tribal hills used occasionally to retire for a spot of leave, and think it Eden—but her last word on the loathsome horror of the place was, "and there's only *one* shop," a remark which in turn recalls a pink-and-white little damsel with the strong accent of Tooting, who had unwisely married a man serving in India. She confided to me that her evening's recreation consisted in going down to the railway station to look at the trains, in order to forget the general dismalness of Quetta, which to other minds is rather a pleasing place, filled with colouring that drives artists to despair.

Shops or no shops, Kargil was distinctly attractive with its setting of great savage hills in the sunset—turning from gaunt brown to pink and madder, rose and maroon, in an air that seemed to have the faint blue tinge of crystal water, infinite distances and space illimitable all about the green valley—room to

move and breathe and think, so altogether unlike the cramped surroundings of towns.

And then next morning to the road again—the road that is always calling to the nomad—the vagrant—like myself, and as we set out in the long-shadowed dawn light among the apricot groves, shortly to be exchanged once more for the barren hillsides, and the winding stony track, I recalled Gerald Gould's poem:

"I know not where the white road runs, nor what the blue hills are,
But a man can have the Sun for a friend, and for his guide a star;
And there's no end of voyaging when once the voice is heard,
For the river calls, and the road calls, and Oh, the call of a bird."

I suppose that's why God made hills and taught man to make roads over them, because they call, the hills and the roads, call us to the "hard, brave things," when otherwise so many of us would be inclined to sit down in comfort, and degenerate, body and mind and soul, forgetting that life is really a road, and thinking it merely a park.

And with that verse running in my head, as things will crop up of a morning—bits and snatches from the years far back—I crossed the bridge over the Suru, and so into bare, treeless country again by the Tehsil of Kargil—the

office of the Dogra Magistrate-*cum*-Lord High Sheriff-*cum* everything else that you can think of in the official line, for Purig, like other bits of Native State, still holds to the elementary truth that if the people are to prosper, power must be wielded by a man and not by a ministry or a corporation, both of which have, I think, been defined as "things that have neither souls to be damned nor posteriors to be kicked."

And being even madder than usual, I sang most of the way—pet verses to airs of my own—and Dog Bill also sang at intervals, both of us making noises, because it is the primitive and God-given instinct of all things living to express their gratitude to their Maker for the pleasant things He has cast into their path, by making such noises as they are able.

To our right hung the great group of snow-clad peaks which the Survey of India labels "D 7." It has a list of several hundred peaks, the least of which would dwarf Mont Blanc—and some are "K" and some are "D," and some are other letters and numbers, very few being allowed names. I don't know whether this indicates a communistic tendency on the part of the Survey, on the grounds that the possession of names renders people proud and incites caste feeling, or whether it is a more

admirable sense of respectful awe, and the feeling that no mere man should be allowed to give names to the living sanctuaries of the gods. I prefer to think it is the latter, but I once read a powerful communistic book, describing the ideal state at which the "Red Flag" aims, and one of the many blessings was that children were not given names, but only numbers, since the possession of names made them think of the parents from whom the names came, and this, of course, led to caste pride. The lad whose father died bayoneting a German machine-gunner who was wiping out his Company is inclined to think himself a potentially better man than the son of the "conschy" who has merely done time for robbing penny-in-the-slot machines. And such a horrid state of things would be unthinkable in an ideal state, since as every enlightened person now knows, there is no such thing as heredity, and the colt of the mare that pulls the milk-cart is just as able to win the Derby as the filly of Signorinetta.

Howbeit, whatever may be the views of the Survey of India, there they are on the map, "D 7," which doesn't alter the fact that they are as wonderful peaks as you can see in many a long day's march, and that morning in the

clear air they were even more wonderful than usual, as we dropped over the long, bare ridge, and made our way down towards the Wakkha river, and the long series of hamlets that form Pashkum.

Pashkum is a gem, an emerald in a setting of arid brown hills, with a stream of foaming, snow-fed water running in a silver streak between the willow-shaded banks. Clusters of little houses of wood and mud, whose flat roofs in another week or two would be golden from the heaps of apricots laid out to dry, for dried fruit is one of the exports of this otherwise somewhat unproductive country.

As I passed through the first of the hamlets, and came out again on to the open road on the further side, I heard strange but rather sweet, monotonous chanting, and perceived that it came from what appeared to be animated hayricks perambulating down the road. Only on closer inspection was it clear that the hayricks had legs—tight trouser legs of creased and many-folded coarse brown blanket cloth—legs of elephantine dimensions belonging to squat-faced, squat-bodied Thibetan women. They halted by the roadside as I passed, and turning disclosed themselves beneath the enormous stacks of pungently scented grass they bore upon their

backs, loads that I would have hesitated to put upon a mule, but which they carried at a steady jog mile after mile, singing cheerily the while, one of them chanting an undertone which had exactly the effect of a deep metal bell.

And then, crossing the stream, we came into a narrow gorge where the road was cut out of the hillside, and presently rose several hundred feet above the stream. Here, on my return journey, I fell in with a lot of Yarkandi pilgrims returning from Mecca. Yarkand is a month's march beyond Leh, and Leh is 450 miles from Pindi, which is where the pilgrims get the train for Bombay or Karachi, whence run the Red Sea steamers. So a pilgrimage for them is indeed a pilgrimage, a matter of months, of lonely roads, and scanty fare, and real hardship, I passed them day after day on my return march from Ladakh, first the more well-to-do on big Yarkandi ponies, then the less affluent on little hired ponies of the country-side, and lastly the very poor, often afoot. I passed their graves, too—little mounds with wild iris springing on them—in deserted places where some had fallen by the wayside, and so entered the last stage of the long road to happiness.

They were men for the most part—hunched up on their saddles, below which were strapped

the bundles of their worldly possessions, bundles garnished with the treasures of civilisation—cheap camp lanterns, and always umbrellas of the Indian bazaar kind. But here and there was an occasional woman, dressed much as her men-folk, save that in lieu of the broad-brimmed felt hat, turned up at the back in Plantagenet style, they wore little caps and muslin veils, pulled discreetly across their faces at the approach of the stranger; strapping women in their breeches and long leather boots which seem the universal Yarkandi footwear—the footwear of a people who do not often walk.

They were unmistakably a Northern folk, with their ruddy cheeks and fair skins, but not talkative, though it may have been the lack of a common language which made them appear so surly, since they neither offered nor returned a greeting, even when I ventured my small stock of their own tongue—the wanderer's "God speed" of Middle Asia:

"Yol Bolsun"—"may there be a road."

Beyond the gorge a mile or two, we came into another little oasis of green fields and silver-grey willows—the tiny hamlet of Lotsun—the last of the Muhammadan villages on the very edge of Lamaland, with—on its outskirts—

a little wooden mosque facing bravely towards what Habib describes as Kufristan. There we passed the time of day with the veterinary assistant, who with his family had beaten us at the start that day, and was now partaking of the morning meal by the side of a little water channel—the lady as ever eating coyly beneath the ample folds of her burkha.

Sidika and I dallied not at Lotsun, for the march before us was long, and I was impatient to enter Lamaland, whose borders lay just ahead over the next rise—five or six miles away. Moreover, we had ourselves eaten before getting to Lotsun, and so had no excuse to laze under the willows, much as I would have liked to under other circumstances.

Only one other incident marked our road into Lamaland. At a steep and narrow point we ran into a party of Ladakhi women also heading for Moulbek, which is the gate of Lamaland. They stopped on the road as we came up, and I had hopes of a photo, since they were a picturesque quartet with their silver ornaments, their braided hair and furry capes above their brown smocks and tight leg-wear. But alas, I told Sidika to ask them what the material of the capes was—goatskin, I thought it—and no sooner had he opened his mouth and put

forth his few words of Thibetan than, with a scream, the three younger fled down the trackless cliff, while the older dame fell upon us with a fury of words, the meaning of which was clearly that the less she saw of us the better she would be pleased. So not desiring that the damsels should cast themselves over the cliff to avoid our brutal and licentious selves, we pursued our way, and thus at last came out after a long, winding climb on to a wider valley near Shergol, where a few little Buddhist chortens marked the beginning of Lamaland.

And there I did halt in a tiny plantation of willows and lay on the turf, rejoicing in this my first view of real Buddhist country, even though it was only the very fringe, for there is perhaps no joy in all the world like that which springs up at the first sight of a land that you have waited years to see. And for twelve years I have waited to see Lamaland and the country that lies beyond—the high snows of Middle Asia, and most of all the Khardong pass and the Karakorum mountains. The Khardong lay yet another 120 miles further on, but that day I felt sure that we should get there—that we should hold our route and make good our rather ambitious programme. And with that pleasant feeling, forgetting the footsore miles that lay

behind, and the even more weary miles that might lie ahead, I picked up "Carlos"—my trusted hill-ash khudstick, fashioned with my own hands, and with Sidika still riding the pony behind me, and Dog Bill trotting alongside, entered into Lamaland as one should enter a strange country—on foot—and with due reverence.

CHAPTER VI

THE GATE OF LAMALAND

As we set forth from Shergol, the entry to Lamaland lay spread out before us—long, wide, eroded terraces of a soft rock, which seemed to my untrained eye to be of great part clay and sandstone, a valley that gave one the impression of having been cut out during the ages by the action of the swift stream of the Wakkha as it poured down from the melting snows.

But the high banks left behind by the sinking waters had then been dealt with by the winds—wrought and carven into hundreds of different shapes—but most often into the likeness of gigantic fortresses, with battlements and towers and now and then massive gateways. One such there was across the river which, even after examination with my field glasses, it was hard to believe natural, so exactly did it resemble an old Moghul gateway near Delhi, where once upon a time I dreamed away many hours of the hot weather.

And here it stood on the edge of High Asia —a great central portal nearly 40 feet high as

far as I could judge, a deep-cut arched gate with battlements above, and almost, in the shadows, I could imagine the heavy timbers and the iron-studded and spiked elephant doors that one felt must be really there.

And just as in the vicinity of my old forgotten gateway on the Jumna, so here, too, all about was seeming ruin of palace and fortress, of tomb and mausoleum. So real did they appear that for a few moments I could hardly force myself to realise that they were but toys made by the high winds on the soft stone, and that the only real things were the little whitewashed Buddhist chortens dotted about.

"Ah, real as in dream all this."

That is what one felt looking over the fantastic view ahead, and as I went forward with that quotation of "A. E.'s" in my head, I decided that they should be real, for after all, it is dreams that are the only true things, really, if you think it out. Realities get smashed to pieces in contact with the hard facts of life, and dreams alone are lasting.

So to me the entrance of Lamaland will always be a vista of fairy palaces and Jinn-made fortalices—parapet and machicoulis, gallery—portcullis and elephant door, as it should really be.

A little further on and I beheld my first monastery or "gompa," as the local term is. It was most appropriately situated at the top of a precipitous cliff of brown mud rock—little tiny windows of rock-hewn chambers, with fronts of pink-and-white stucco, altogether in keeping with this land of dreams.

I was certain sure that it was the monastery where once lived the Lama mourned in Punch's *Thibetan Lament*:

"The loveliest of our Lamas
Has passed beyond the door,
He'll never wear pyjamas
Any more, any more.

"Above the yawning chasm
He tried to pass a yak,
But it took a sneezing spasm,
And blew him off the track."

And when that happens to a benevolent Lama, spectacled and absent-minded, his chances of wearing any more pyjamas are few, and as the poet mournfully continues:

"So the silent valley has him,
And he can't come back.

"The sweetest of our Lamas
Has passed beyond the door,
And he'll never wear pyjamas
Any more."

I saw the yak, but the Lama wasn't there "any more, any more." The bottom of the

silent valley was out of sight, and perhaps he was still down there—a long and nasty drop.

But although there was no Lama in view, there were several groups of villagers homeward-bound from their fields, the men in their long, loose grey coats bound about the waist with cummerbunds, shapeless boots of felt on their feet, and necks gay with red necklaces of coral, set off by their big silver earrings, turquoise-gemmed, under the quaint fur-edged peaked caps.

Women, too, there were, with similar boots and ornaments, but bare-headed, save for their beraghs. The beragh is the almost universal head-dress of the women of Western Thibet, and consists of a long strip of red cloth—roughly the shape of a cobra with expanded hood. The head of the snake lies on the forehead, the hood covers the centre of the wearer's head, the body and tail hang down behind. And on to it, making as it were the shining scales of the serpent, are sewn turquoises—as many as the owner can afford.

The Indian woman generally wears her husband's entire capital in beaten silver ornaments, and often in actual necklaces of rupees. The Ladakhi woman turns it into turquoises and wears it on her head, save just for a little, which

goes into silver bracelets, or sometimes ivory ones—and necklaces of coral and other semi-precious stones. The beragh is an heirloom from mother to daughter, and some of them must be well worth having.

Originally the invention of a queen, it is now worn by all and sundry, and some of them have the tail upturned and worked in coral beads, making a blue snake with a red tail. It is in some remote way connected with the old snake worship of pre-Buddhist days—one of the symbols that have survived unchanged.

I don't know why mankind should ever have worshipped the snake, though it is a cult that was once widespread through the East, for all that it now remains but as a symbol whose very meaning is forgotten. With it runs the worship of the sun and the moon—perfectly intelligible deities to a primitive people—and among the Mahrattas of the Dekhan the three great clans are those which claim their descent from Sun and Moon and Snake respectively.

The latest excavations in South America reveal the same forms of worship—a fact which gives one furiously to think, for South America and the Middle East are far enough apart.

Another half-hour, and we entered Moulbek, which is the first village on the road in Lamaland

proper. It was complete, with steep rock pinnacle crowned with a monastery, and a tiny rest house on the edge of the green expanse of the polo-ground by the river, for polo is the game of Ladakh, as it is of Gilgit and Hunza and Baltistan. Only in these places it is the game of all the world, and not as it has become in Europe and America—the pastime of the rich.

While waiting for the transport to come in, I climbed on to the diminutive pony which Sidika had ridden most of the way, and trotted out through the huddled huts of the village to inspect the great image of Chumba, who is the patron deity of the place, which is sometimes called Mulba Chumba instead of Moulbek.

The great, stone-carved image stands in—or rather on—a little shrine, above which wave the usual streamers and the quaint ornaments of coloured cloth, for all the world like dirigible balloons set on end, and, of course, the image was hung with garlands of marigolds—the universal flower of shrines wherever Hinduism or Buddhism prevails. The image—in spite of its four arms—was not quite Hindu, though by no means to be compared with the beauty of the Gandhara sculptures, with which I had made acquaintance elsewhere. The face lacked the sensuality of the Hindu images, but it lacked

also the beauty which the Græco-Buddhists of the early centuries brought to Asia—faint memories of the wonderful beauty of the sculptures of Ancient Greece. Sometimes along the North-West frontier one comes across old sculptures from Græco-Buddhist times, and there is no mistaking whence their inspiration was drawn, for the Greek model, howsoever debased, is unmistakable.

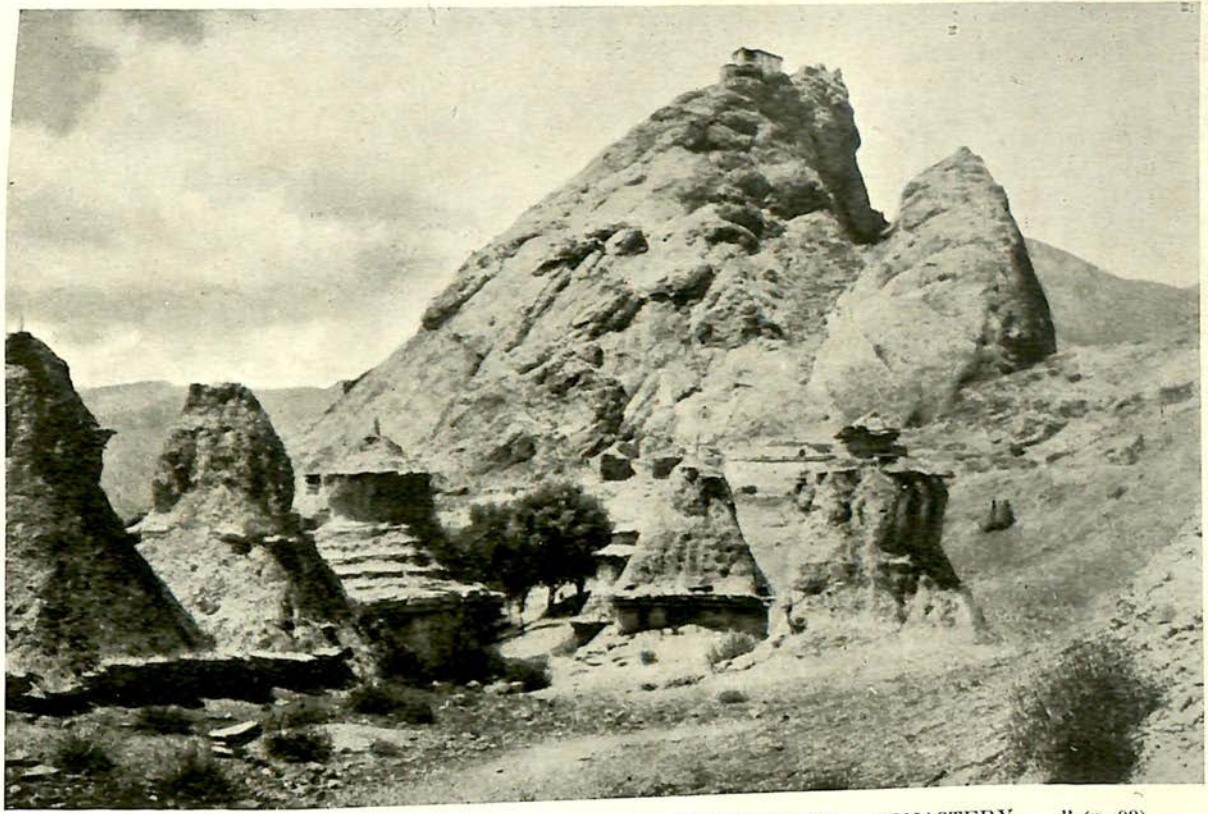
But here in the Moulbek image there was, to my mind, more of Hinduism—it was a lower class of work altogether. Habib amused me by insisting that the flat-chested statue represented a woman, and was placed there so that when the devil came at the last day he would be so attracted by the lady, that in dalliance with her he would forget his primary duty of destruction of the world, and so the local people might escape. His theological ideas are rather quaint at times, and his folk-lore garbled, even though distinctly amusing. I don't know where he got the idea from, but nothing would convince him that Chumba was not a woman, or as he called it, a " memsahib."

He treats me as a harmless lunatic in many things, but never more so than when I advance theories as to local religious customs, or road knowledge gleaned from maps. I think he puts

down my nice Survey of India maps, and my few survey instruments, as special toys for the child-like-minded sahib. He always asks me how far the next march is going to be according to the map, or what the climb will be like, and chuckles over my answers, since his computations of distance are based purely on time. A bad, steep road of 10 miles he describes as "20," and a level one of 18 is put down as "12." But then, of course, time is, I suppose, his sole guide in the matter, and only comparative time at that, for a watch is beyond his ken.

That evening he discoursed at length on the Buddhist monks and nuns, whom he seemed to hold in considerable contempt, as indeed he did most things of Ladakh, except only record heads of game. Of course, to an Eastern mind, the idea of abstinence between the sexes, which is really the basis of monasticism, is a most incomprehensible thing. Hindu and Musalman are at one on perhaps that point alone—that woman exists solely for man's pleasure and use, and apart from him serves no purpose at all in the world, with the obvious corollary that it is utterly foolish and almost ungrateful to your Creator to refrain from the pleasures that He has specially created woman to provide.

Not, I fear, that all the monks of Thibet do



". . . COMPLETE WITH STEEP ROCK PINNACLE, CROWNED WITH A MONASTERY . ." (p. 92)
Moulbek.

so refrain by any means. But nominally they should, and we were discussing the theory rather than the actual practice, as we sat outside the rest house in the dusk watching *yeh log* chasing madly over the turf of the polo-ground in their joy at being freed from their basket after the day's march.

Vaguely one talks of the Thibetans as Buddhists, but this is really very far from the truth if by Buddhism we mean the religion preached by Gautama, whose life and teaching have been set forth so charmingly in *The Light of Asia.*

Briefly, Buddha, absorbed by the contemplation of human suffering, indeed of the suffering of every sentient being in the world, came to the conclusion that its root and origin lay in the desire to live, and that freedom was only to be attained by the cessation of life. But since, according to the Hindu school from which he sprang, each individual life is only one in an unending chain of existences, something more than mere bodily death was necessary to free the soul from mortal suffering. In common with the Hindu, he taught that each existence depended on the previous ones, that good deeds in one life led to rebirth on a higher plane in the next, and vice versa. So far he differs in no way from the ordinary theoretical teachings

of pure Hinduism. Where he varies is that he admits no intermediary between the soul and the Creator, whereby his doctrines are in conflict with practically all religions. Hinduism, however, had long before his day degenerated from its original monotheistic beliefs into admitting whole series of minor deities—nominally mere incarnations of individual attributes of the Supreme Being; actually, adopted class and tribal deities of the various races which came into Hinduism, as its Aryan founders extended their power over India.

The Thibetans originally, when we first meet them in the Chinese annals, appear to have been pure savages with a reputation for cannibalism. About 600 years before Christ, one Laotse founded the Taoist cult in China, and thence it spread rapidly into Thibet. The Taoists of those days were frankly atheists of complete immorality in dress and customs, and either in jest or otherwise, gave themselves the name of the "Pure doers," becoming known in Thibet as the "Bon chos."

The primitive Thibetan was probably—as are most real savages—an animist and devil-worshipper, and took kindly to the Bon religion, whose worshippers indulged in rites of the most indecent and cruel type, even to the extent of

human sacrifice, the whole tricked out with unlimited mummery, the gods as represented by their idols being creatures of most hideous and revolting appearance.

By the sixth century A.D., Buddhism in Northern India had deteriorated into something but little different from Hinduism. In place of Gautama's one all-absorbing Being, to amalgamate with whom, and so escape rebirth and consequent sorrow, was the aim and end of the true Buddhist, we find endless deities, sometimes nominal previous reincarnations of Gautama himself, or of his more noted disciples, sometimes barely veiled adoptions from Hinduism. Moreover, apart from the higher forms of Hinduism, there existed the Tantric cult, which made a worship of lust and bloodshed, and added to the original deities female counterparts of even more doubtful attributes than their Lords and Masters.

In its competition with Hinduism, Buddhism adopted even those doctrines which with their appeals to the senses offered something tangible to the ordinary human being of the Orient, whereas Buddha's system of philosophy called in reality but to the cultured few.

And it was Buddhism thus perverted that was introduced into Greater Thibet by Padma

Sambhava from India at the request of King Sron Tsan Gampo. In Western Thibet there were earlier missionaries, sent by the great Buddhist King of India—Asoka—but such success as they may have achieved vanished beneath the weight of the degraded and more popular cult adopted later by Lhassa.

Padma Sambhava subjugated the devils of the Bon worship, but subsequently allowed them to be brought into the Thibetan faith, provided that they were duly obedient to his power, and that they were nourished and propitiated—by the worshippers, of course. And thus, in steps the inevitable intermediary—the Lama—capable on the one hand of controlling the malevolent activities of the demons, at a price, of course, and on the other of receiving in his visible person the necessary material gifts for his invisible charges, the demons.

The Thibetans, a mountain people with the natural superstition common to all ignorant races who live under the high snows, with the terrors of gale and snowfall and avalanche ever before them, and the bleak solitude of the heights about them, inevitably came under the thumb of the Lamas, and so to-day the Lama is the most important person in Thibet, and the Thibetan's life is literally one un-

ceasing round of devil-dodging from birth to death.

Of Buddhism proper but little exists beyond the name and the image, and often in a monastery you will find the images of the many Buddhas in the outer chapel, while in a closed room behind, to which access is forbidden, will be the more important demonic representations.

The Lamas, living either on rich lands given to their monasteries from time to time in the past, or by the fees which they demand continually from the people to protect them from the devils, are trained in exorcism and devil-scaring spells, and naturally every family likes to get one or more of its members into the Lamahood. The nun, in Western Thibet anyway, does not live in convents of women as in Christian countries, but is, as it were, a servant or lay sister of the Lamas' monasteries, doing the more menial work of sewing, cooking, and the like.

On both monk and nun are enjoined celibacy and abstinence, but the Lamas in many instances—whatever may be the case of the nuns—treat the injunctions lightly, refraining merely from marriage, and even in that respect, quite recently the Skushog, or, as we should say,

"Abbot," of a monastery near Leh actually took unto himself a real wife.

With this slight glimpse of their religious beliefs, one can understand how it is that every village in Lamaland is engrossed in the all-absorbing task of scaring demons, and how it is that from Moulbek onward the road is one long succession of *māné* walls and chortens, prayer banners and prayer wheels.

The *māné* wall is, as it were, the first line of defence against the spirits of evil. The name comes from the second syllable of the great text of the Buddhist scriptures, "*Om Mane Padme Hum*," "Hail, jewel of the Lotus," the beginning of the verse which Edwin Arnold has translated:

> "The dew is on the Lotus—Rise, Great Sun!
> And lift my leaf and mix me with the wave.
> *Om mane padme hum*, the sunrise comes!
> The dew-drop slips into the shining sea!"

The dew-drop is the soul, the shining sea is the All-Embracing Spirit of the world, into which, when Nirvana is attained, the soul will be absorbed, and so escape rebirth. You see the origin of the imagery on the Kashmir lakes at dawn, when the great lotus leaves are covered with dew, fine moisture which, as the sun rises, condenses into one jewel-like drop in the basin

of the leaf, until finally the motion of the breeze or the weight of the drop itself tilts the leaf and the jewel slips into the translucent waters around, to vanish for evermore.

The mystic line is carved upon flat stones, and these stones are piled in walls outside the villages as breastworks against demon attack, and sometimes they are built along the sides of roads for the safety of wayfarers. At the entrance of Moulbek lies one such in the shadow of a cluster of half-ruined chortens—conical structures of plastered and whitewashed mud, surmounted by spire-like erections of thirteen rings, signifying the thirteen ages through which the world must pass. Here, again, it is of interest to note that this present age is the thirteenth, just as in Hinduism we are supposed to be in the last age, and as in almost all religions, this our age is said to be the last, the one preceding the final Coming.

In the side of the chortens are often niches about the height of a man from the ground, in which you may find little mud objects like pork pies, roughly conical. Sometimes there are but one or two, sometimes half a dozen or more, for you to take out and handle if you are so disposed. Only please return them, for they are Lamas—attenuated and small—but Lamas

nevertheless, or as much of them as remains after a man's body has been burnt, or in Greater Thibet carven to strips and fed to the dogs—and the bones are then pounded to paste and made into these rough moulds.

And so at Moulbek I entered into the first of the anti-devil ring fences, and returning from my visit to Chumba passed a *mānė* wall, leaving it on my right to ensure due protection from the demons, who assuredly to some minds would be well placed in this wild, fantastic country ringed with its gaunt and creviced hills, and its weird, unearthly beauty of naked rock. Only somehow I didn't feel that I wanted any particular protection from devils in Ladakh, for I think that they more likely congregate in the sinks and stews of towns, in the huddled buildings around dark shrines, in the hearts of places like Benares, rather than in the naked mountains under the sunlight and the snow, where men are merely men facing hardship day after day. Such places could not breed devils of the only kind that would really matter, those that might defile men's hearts and make them less than men.

But I think Habib still has lurking beliefs in them, for all his contempt for the Thibetans, and he likes the security of rest houses, of firelit

camps and the presence of sahibs who are to some extent proof against devils, since apparently the absence of belief in demons is apt to drive them away, and sahibs notably refuse to believe in malevolent denizens of the other world. Moreover, *yeh log* probably chase them off, since certainly if gloom and despondency be devils, I know of no better amulet than a dog or two to scare them away.

CHAPTER VII

OVER THE NIMAKI LA

THE two marches beyond Moulbek promised to be interesting, since they lay over two passes, and passes to me are the most fascinating of places—even more fascinating than roads. Like roads they show you new horizons, fresh countries, but the passes do more than that, since they spell endeavour and height attained, a getting away from the monotony of the flats. I think most Western men have this desire to reach high places, to look over the mountains; somewhere deep in our hearts is the wish to surmount difficulties, to reach places hard of access. It is—to my mind—a divine spark in humanity, this love of striving to get above the lower levels, whether of physical surroundings or of mental outlook.

I think that from the beginning man was made for endeavour, and if ever—which God forbid—a time should come when the need for endeavour ceases, he will deteriorate and sink into something far lower than the animals. In the beginning he had to fight against the beasts,

more heavily armed than himself with tooth and claw, superior in weight and speed, better armoured with scale and tough hide, inferior at two points only, resource and courage. Then he had to strive with his fellow-man, guard himself and the woman and the child against the beast-man, a far more dangerous foe than the cave tiger or the prehistoric giant reptile, the beast-man whose type endures still to-day, and will, I think, endure till the last human life dies out in the cold and silence of a dying planet.

And where, owing to the march of civilisation, the beast is no longer met with, and the beast-man is temporarily restrained, man strives still against the elements, the forces of nature, risking life in conflict with the winds and the sea, the mountains and the high snows. But when he has conquered them all, beast and beast-man, peril of wave and wind, and rides as he does to-day, master of the unstable air, it is only to find in the end that the one thing he has actually conquered is himself, that in the facing of discomfort and hardship, of risk and danger, he has learnt to be captain of his own soul, and like the hero in *Fortitude*, can see at last the face of the rider of the Beast—his own.

"He that shall lose his life shall gain it,"

said the Speaker of all truth nearly two thousand years ago, and to me that seems one of the finest of all sayings in every application. But one of the curses of our modern civilisation is just this, that such a premium is sometimes set upon mere life that it ceases to be worth the living. I often think the world has lost a great deal in gaining the security of life which civilisation has brought, for such a sense of security has often a softening and demoralising effect upon humanity—made, as I conceive it, to face risks bravely, to hold earthly life as of moderate value compared with other, greater things. Somewhere in *The Crown of Wild Olives* Ruskin has a passage to the effect that a soldier's calling is a good one, since it means that he has at least thought out how to die—and no man can live properly until he has done that.

And in the correction of this misguided emphasis upon the security of mere life, it seems to me that woman could play her finest part, for I think her rôle should be to help a man face the hard things, to stiffen his failing courage, even though at cost of suffering to herself. And in doing so she would also be making a great return, for men also have to suffer; their unceasing toil, fatigue and pain, wounds sometimes and death, are the price of the shelter that

civilised woman enjoys for herself and her children.

So if I had the bringing up of a girl, the first thing I would instil into her would be the all-importance of sending any man who came into her hands—lover, or husband, or son—forth to face hard things bravely, as did the women of the old stories of the days of chivalry, who held to their men's belief, that the greater the danger, the more the honour in facing it. She will surely be more than repaid in the love that she will gain from the man who knows that he has tried to do fine things more finely because of her.

This has nothing to do with the Nimaki La pass, which is what I set out to describe when I began this chapter, but it shows how the mind and pen will wander, not only here in civilised comfort with an electric reading-lamp at my elbow as I write, but out away in the wilds. For the sight of the first of the Ladakh passes started just the train of thought I have here set down.

We had left Moulbek two or three miles behind, passing between rich fields of waving green barley where worked Thibetan women with great red turquoise-studded beraghs. Here and there they wore big astrakhan ear-flaps which, woven into their braided tresses,

stood out six inches or so on either side of the wearer's head like the ruffs in Elizabethan portraits. The day was nearly cloudless and all about us the red and brown hills showed sharp cut and fantastic in the thin air. Moulbek itself is over 11,000 feet, which is a reasonably high altitude for a valley floor, and it always seems to me that after 9,000 feet up, the air begins to thin somewhat, and, in the barer places anyway, to give that wonderful clarity of view which is such a feature of the high hills.

We had turned off left-handed up a dry nullah bed of yellow sand flanked by low rolling brown hills of stone, among which our path wound upward in long curves. It was lifeless country, strangely so after the fertile stretches of riverain country about Moulbek, and only once did we meet with anything alive—a couple of laden tzos and a tiny party of ragged wayfarers.

And then suddenly and unexpectedly, for my route book was inaccurate and my map antiquated, Sidika and I emerged on a sharp crest, to see the narrow path drop away down a similar but more winding nullah on the other side, and as I halted by the inevitable stone cairn that is set to mark a pass, I realised that we stood on the 13,000-foot summit of the

Nimaki La. Behind us showed range after range of jagged-toothed hills, flecked sometimes with snow, red hills with wonderful translucent blue shadows everywhere, the further peaks veiled here and there by filmy wisps of cloud, for rain was beating up behind us now, though we ourselves on the pass still stood in unbroken sunlight.

Ahead of us the road vanished down a defile among the rounded brown slopes, and far off were great, sharp hills of jagged rock, long sweeps of mountain wall, and once the distant vista of a real snow peak.

I stayed there a while drinking it all in, the wonder of the great spaces before and behind, the silence of the hills about us, content for a space to be alone on one of the higher places of the earth, the heights which make one feel so very small, and help so much to cure any tendency to think oneself of greater value than one's fellow men and women.

Then since the time for the midday halt drew on, and there was no water in sight, I went on down the slope, for Sidika would need water to wash his hands before eating, and also to drink, and I dislike sitting down to a meal if my men can't have theirs also. A mile or so more, and we came upon the beginnings of a

stream percolating through the sandy soil. And then it was that below us we spotted a cavalcade. It was a small party of mounted men with a few men on foot beside them, and as we watched, up the slope towards them moved an unmistakable doolie, the litter of the East, borne by plodding porters, and used by sick men, women, and Oriental persons of standing. The men on foot and the doolie bearers wore gaily coloured clothes, that much I could see, so, after my first glance through the glasses, I said to Sidika that it must be some great Lama. But he objected that no Lama or any other sane person would climb a bare hill like that one, and therefore it must be a sahib. So food forgotten for the moment, we pushed forward again, to see who the travellers might be.

The gay red clothes brought to my mind the scarlet-robed chuprassis who adorn the Secretarial buildings of Delhi and Simla, and I bethought me of the British Joint Commissioner at Leh, whom at that time I had not met. A little nearer, and we saw clearly that it was unmistakably a sahib, for the person sitting by the doolie—now placed upon the ground—wore a felt hat of conventional Western type. Then, as we got closer and they looked our way, I picked out another sahib—a bearded

giant of a man—and so placed my party, an American and his wife whom I had met at a friend's house the previous year.

I climbed the steep little hill, and was courteously received by the two of them, albeit without any recognition, and they spread the rug of hospitality—a very gaudy one of Yarkand it was—for me to repose on as we sat in the shade of the green canvas doolie, wherein the lady travelled. It was some time before they placed me, despite my references to mutual friends, but once they did, conversation was easier.

While we sat talking, up the valley towards us came a string of forty or more ponies laden with gear, and I was privileged to see an old-time camp being pitched by the thirty or so men in their train. Had I seen the baggage ponies earlier, I could have placed the party even at a distance, for no Englishman would have moved with a train of that description. The Englishman travelling for pleasure in the East has but one idea when he goes into the wilds—to free himself as far as possible from the trammels of the following that Oriental convention sometimes binds upon him in his official capacity, and travels light with a few picked men. Moreover, he gives his men warm puttoo suits and good leather chaplis, rather

than gaudy red waistcoats and gold-embroidered caps.

It was an interesting contrast in many ways, my little string of men and beasts passing this huge caravan—different at every point, just as the clothes we white men wore differed. There was I, newly shaven, in my conventional khaki shirt and shorts, stockings and chaplis, carrying naught save a stick, while the three Americans, for two more men joined us shortly, wore respectively a brown canvas suit and white deck-shoes without socks, riding-breeches and coat, grey flannel trousers tucked into puttees, with the most *voyant* of tartan shirts of the widest checks. Moreover, they had not used a razor for many weeks, and all wore leather belts from which depended the most wonderful collection of oddments, spring balances, great clasp knives, tin openers and the like.

As we sat there talking, I watched three camps spring up, one for the leader of the party and his wife, a pleasant-voiced, pleasant-faced American woman, another for the caravan bashi and his following, a third for the two younger men. Under no conditions would anyone else I know have selected that site for a camp, far from water and far from fuel, but were there not thirty or forty men to fetch and carry and

dig out the steep hillside, until there was flat space enough to pitch the green canvas tents, and spread the rich-coloured rugs, whereon the Americans slept, for they scorned such things as camp beds and Rurki chairs, tables and other such luxuries beloved of the Britisher.

Came to us then Ibrahim—Arghun of Leh—caravan bashi, i.e. headman of the outfit. The Arghuns are the half-breeds of Leh, where meets the trade of Mongolia and Northern India—the offspring generally of Indian fathers and Mongolian mothers. He was an imposing figure, in long plum-coloured choga whose skirts swept his soft riding-boots, snowy muslin turban, whip tucked into the back of his belt, and Quran slung by a strap over his shoulder, as he dismounted from his gaily caparisoned pony and greeted me with just that Oriental nuance that marked the difference of our status, I with my tiny string of hired ponies and quietly clad men, and he the shadow of the owners of the big caravan and the camps growing about us. I think Ibrahim grows rich on piloting people whose money is somewhat in excess of their knowledge of human nature in general, and of the Oriental nature in particular, and who have not had the advantage of spending many years with the cream of the Indian Empire—

the fighting classes of land-holders, from the peasant of three acres to the feudal barony of the Land of Princes.

Nothing would suit the Americans but that I must eat the midday meal with them, a pleasant repast served on the gay rugs, mostly of Oriental dishes, with tea specially brewed for me by my hostess, since what Englishman could be expected to go without tea? They were excellent hosts, full of cultured conversation and kindliness, and I left with regret, though liking not their fashion of camping, savouring as it did too much of the East for my Western mind, which after twenty years of the Orient still prefers our simpler methods. But then, perhaps my trade as a soldier biasses me in the matter. Looking back, I pondered rather deeply over this question of "globe-trotting," a line of thought that persisted all the rest of my march down the bare valley.

Travel is undoubtedly one of the great pleasures of life, but the question arises, just how far is one entitled to pursue it? Myself I travel whenever I can in my short holidays, which are the right of every working man. I have friends who travel further—for two and three years on end—writers and explorers, archæologists and naturalists, the fruit of whose wan-

derings is the enriching of the world's knowledge with books and maps, with scientific lore of all kinds. In other words, they give the world something in exchange for their keep.

And looking at life, it seems to me that we must all work, that the possession of wealth is not a permit to abstain from toil, but merely a facility granted to the individual, whereby he may choose his line of labour, instead of being forced—as is the majority of mankind—to labour at the first task which promises food and shelter, with perhaps a little margin over for comfort.

When I see people spending year after year travelling from place to place for no other object than their own pleasure, and giving the world nothing in return, I cannot help wondering if they have morally the right to do so, and feeling somehow that they haven't, that they are trees without fruit. I have no quarrel with their wealth, or the leisure that that wealth brings, for both are vital to the world if mankind is to progress at all. But I quarrel with the use that many people make of these gifts of fortune, which should enable them to take up unremunerative tasks, greatly necessary to the world, but which, since they yield so little livelihood, are impossible for most of us, such as

scientific research, medical work among the poor, politics in their true sense of Government and national administration for the advantage of the governed.

With that thought in my head I entered the valley of the Sangeloomah at the edge of the cultivation and hamlets of Kharbu. Across the stream lay a delightful little cliff-built village, with a red-and-white stucco-fronted monastery crowning its highest peak, and ruins of cliff fortresses all about, relics from the joyous freebooting days of King Deldan, ideal places for freebooters' holds, provided only that they could store water enough.

Thus at last I came to the tiny rest house of Bod Kharbu, set in a patch of emerald fields among the great jagged mountains, all wreathed to-day with filmy mist that turned to rain as the evening drew on.

Dog Bill, who advances in years, was feeling the long marches and suffering from intermittent rheumatism, now in one leg and now in another, and I had to give him the only remedy I could think of, a hot mustard bath applied in patches so to speak. He had travelled that day, much to his disgust, in the basket with the puppies, and emerged from it very stiff and cross, and judging by that unfailing

barometer, his little tail, seemed to consider life as a poor affair altogether.

While waiting for my early dinner, the bleating of many goats brought me out on to the verandah to see the village flocks returning from the grazing grounds, long-haired goats for the most part, with a few small mountain oxen. There came with them several women in goatskin capes à la Robinson Crusoe, carrying conical baskets upon their backs, baskets laden sometimes with grain, and sometimes with wizen-featured, slit-eyed little Mongolian babies, with quaint tinsel-adorned, tasselled caps hung with charms and talismans. They were all—mothers and babies—unspeakably dirty, but joyously quaint to the eye, and a cheery, laughing folk.

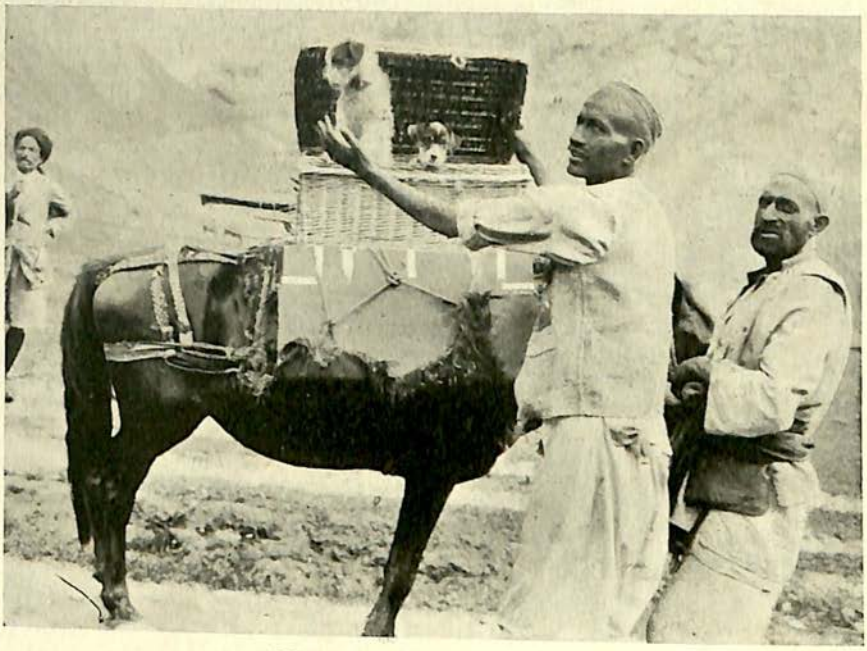
As I stood there watching them pass, Habib came up in his usual grave fashion to tell me that Kadra—the camp coolie and man-of-all-work—was suffering from severe pain in his "heart"—the actual spot pointed out being what I think the doctors call "the middle line," well below the ribs. Shortness of breath was also complained of, both maladies being common to men facing the heights for the first time.

I said that ginger was the best of remedies, but unfortunately had none with me. Of course, the sahib log also applied brandy, but naturally

a good Musalman like Kadra could not avail himself of something forbidden by the prophet. Habib very lengthily, and without the tremor of a smile, expounded a theory that when the mind didn't know, the conscience couldn't prick, and it would be all right if the contents of my travelling flask were described as "medicine."

"Moreover," he continued, "having drunk, let him say, '*Tauba, Tauba,*' and become a good Musalman once more."

"*Tauba, Tauba,*" is the *Mea Culpa* of Islam, and I would dearly have loved to see the ceremony. Hitherto I had not suspected Habib of such depths of plausibility, not to say guile. The previous year, when with a friend of mine who had taken a ham into camp, Habib with blank face had failed to show a single head of game until the ham was finally cast into a mountain ravine. Thereafter, according to my friend, the stag simply swarmed into view. Being a Western materialist, he attributed the change to a combination of chance and extra endeavour on Habib's part once the ham had been sacrificed, but according to the shikari it was the unclean meat that kept the game away. I suppose, according to Habib, even the very animals respect the law of the prophet, and what self-respecting stag would come to be killed by a



YEH LOG ON THE ROAD

". . . WOMEN IN GOATSKIN CAPES, CARRYING CONICAL BASKETS . . ." (p. 117)
Ladakhis in Leh.

blatant infidel whose store yakhdan contained a portion of that accursed animal, the pig?

Be that as it may, I have met the same phenomenon elsewhere, when I used to pursue the wily panther with a beady-eyed Bhil shikari in the hills of Northern Gujrat. He was a good honest pagan, with a nice little tame god made out of a two-foot, red-daubed stone on a forest-covered hill. And never each trip until I had paid Marson two rupees to buy a goat for sacrifice to the godling did luck come my way, whereas no sooner had a goat been duly slain than panther tracks and panthers materialised unfailingly. I visited the little godling one day —a long, steep, stony climb—and found him fat and smiling and content, a podgy stone figure benevolently regarding the decaying head of the goat to which I was supposed to owe the great leopard skin being rough-cured in my camp below. But I think the greater power lay in the remainder of the goat which reposed in the slightly distended stomachs of my Bhil following, rather than in the fly-blown head and the bowl of blood which was the godling's share.

Still, the East is joyously childish in many ways, and I always keep on good terms with village godlings and shrines and holy places. Moreover, it is but common courtesy to pay due

regard to the beliefs and superstitions of your fellow-men, provided that they are of the innocuous type beloved of the peasantry, and any man who mocks openly at other people's gods, as I have sometimes heard people do, must be at heart a cad.

To revert to Kadra, who next morning was a very broken reed, and had to be put on the spare pony. He finally collapsed about halfway to the next pass, the Photu La, and I forthwith filled him up with brandy. The stinging raw spirit was evidently the correct prescription, for he rubbed his "heart" (location as before) as he rose up a new man and for the next few days kept on beseeching me for more of the excellent "medicine." I somehow doubt if the subsequent "*Tauba*" ejaculation was accompanied with that real regret for the sin of commission which, according to Christian ideas, is necessary to secure forgiveness and reinstatement.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PHOTU LA AND LAMAYURU

THE night at Kharbu was cold, with rain beating against the verandah where I was sleeping, the head of my camp bed screened by a table set on end, so that I was glad when the clouds cleared towards morning and let us set out on our next march to the Photu in sunshine under a cloud-dappled sky. The fields and willow trees about us were new washed after the night's downpour, looking sweet and fresh in contrast to the bare hills of jagged rock and the ruined old castles of tumbled stone that rose on every side.

Our setting forth was marked by an extreme revival of spirits on the part of Dog Bill, due presumably to the mustard bath of the night before. He proceeded to chase one of the baggage ponies, snapping at its heels with such vigour that it forthwith tore free from the man who was holding it and—shedding its load as it went—fled down the steep track towards a stream now considerably swollen from the night's rain.

My particular treasure—a combination of mule trunk and camp dressing-table, the work of my own hands—hurtled through the air to land heavily upon a stone, and when it was retrieved, I felt some pride in my handiwork, since barring a long rip in the canvas cover no harm had been done. Habib, after the manner of the immemorial East, proceeded to beat the pony man, while Aziza the cook secured the frightened pony. Then, having reloaded the beast and subdued Dog Bill, we crossed the stream, riding in turns on the spare pony so as to save wetting our footwear, and thus began our march in earnest.

A little way on we spotted a flight of wild pigeon, and I was weak-minded enough to get my gun out from its case on one of the ponies, thinking that the birds might be easily bagged. They would be a pleasant change to eternal leathery chicken. But they were wily, and the end of an hour's breathless climbing was one solitary bird, and my caravan dim spots in the distance. The first shot had sent Dog Bill off like a streak of lightning, for he hates gun noises even more than he used to hate horses, though now that the pups have grown up he has learnt to follow with them when I am riding, a thing he used never to do. But then, after a scamper, he gets some of the pony's gur—the unrefined

sugar of the East—and so perhaps considers the game worth while.

As Sidika and I made our way down to the road, I reflected on the futility of beginning a long march to a high pass by chasing elusive birds. The Photu La lay somewhere screened in the great hills ahead, and it is 13,400 feet high, which is a fair height to take in your day's march. We crossed the stream of the Sangeloomah by a narrow bridge of the inevitable cantilever pattern of rickety woodwork, where the snow water ran in a deep-cut rock defile under a towering cliff. We plodded our steady way along the valley, a bare, gaunt valley of brown hills, with but little to see save once when we passed a small village that lay up a side arm, and once a collection of tumble-down chortens.

Then, at a point where the Sangeloomah ran off right-handed to its head-waters in a tumbled valley full of great snow beds, under a gigantic rock peak some six miles off, we found the ponies and the men having their midday halt, with among them a very shamefaced little Bill dog.

They were away before Sidika and I had finished our lunch, or breakfast, or whatever one chooses to call the meal—"brunch" is

the expression preferred by some—and we followed them up a long ridge round which snaked a narrow water channel conveying the water from the melting snows on our right to a little cluster of fields below us.

It was a long pull though not steep, but at last we got our reward as we came out upon a gently sloping neck, between the higher hills on either hand, and halted by a pile of stones. Passes are always marked that way, though why I don't quite know. Some people say that the little cairns are there to guide the wayfarer in snow time, others, and I think with more truth, tell you that the piles represent men, and are designed to scare off the wind devils whom in common with a few million other demons the Thibetan is always combating. The stones are generally piled into the rough figure of a dwarf man with a larger block set for his head, and at a distance on a sharp-cut skyline are absurdly like little dumpy men, so much so that I have sometimes studied them for a long time before being sure that they were only stones and not men watching us.

Before us the ground dropped away sharply in a long slope, and a few miles off, perched on a precipitous cliff, was the most fantastic huddle of buildings, a regular Arthur Rackham picture

of a goblin fortress—Lamayuru. Far away beyond it I could make out the high mountains where must lie my goal—the Khardong pass on the road to Yarkand—and nearer was the back of a sugar-loaf hill of 20,000 odd feet, which formed a landmark for several days. "Mount Sacrifice" is the name the Leh missionaries give to it, but I don't know why.

The only life we met with on the pass were a couple of ravens who flopped about inviting Bill to chase them, and two young and rather skittish tzos. Finding he couldn't catch the ravens, Bill turned his attention to the tzos, but for once he found something that faced him with lowered horns instead of scuttling away in ungainly fashion like the cattle of India. Whereupon he proceeded to explain that he didn't really take any interest in them, and was looking for a stone he had lost. I have never seen anything quite so funny as his determined efforts to impress on everyone that black tzos with long horns and woolly tails held no interest for him. His attitude was positively human.

A short halt, and then we went on down the valley in front, past a small gathering of men with ponies and tzos halting for the day on their way in from Leh—long-skirted, pigtailed Thibetans, making buttered tea in the shelter

of the piled-up bales of goods they were carrying down towards Dras, probably bound for India in the end.

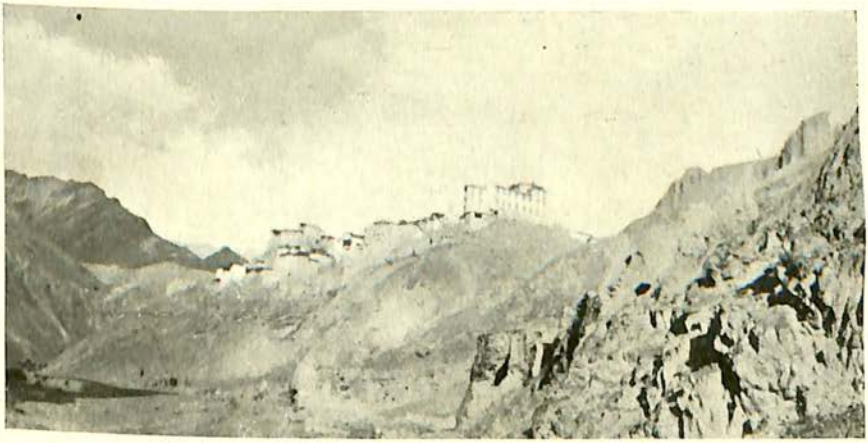
Before long we lost sight of Lamayuru as we swung down the descent, and it was over an hour before we got our next glimpse of it—more Rackham-like than ever, with a long wall of *māné* stones and rows of chortens marking our way in. The *māné* walls were rather more ornate here, and beside the usual text-carved stones, I found some very beautiful ones bearing seated images of Buddha that I rather longed to steal, only it seemed to me sacrilegious to take away things like that which someone had put there as offerings to his gods. So I left them, probably to become the prey of globe-trotters with different ideas from mine.

Frankly weary to-day, I sat in a deck chair in the rest house of Lamayuru, looking down the valley dropping away below me, the first part a little glimpse of rich fields of waving crops with, on my left, tier after tier of mud and stone houses, a warren of tiny habitations plastered against the lower slopes of the great cliff, whose top was surmounted by a big monastery of the inevitable sugar-cake type.

Vixen and Vagrant found the most delectable refuse heap, and then came to tell me about it,

LAMAYURU FROM THE PHOTU LA SIDE (p. 125)

VIXEN AND THE IMPS (p. 127)



LAMAYURU FROM THE WANLA CHU SIDE

so I carried them one in each hand at arm's length, and with the offer of a nickel anna, induced two of the most disreputable Mongolian imps I have met to assist me in the task of making *yeh log* fit to associate with once more.

The imps, who themselves had obviously never been washed in all their lives, thoroughly enjoyed the process of holding the puppies while I scrubbed them in a water channel, and subsequently washed the blanket which lines their travelling basket. When the bath was over, and *yeh log* were, comparatively speaking, white once more, the imps brought their friends, and the rest of the afternoon was a riot of screams and yells and laughter as the children made advances to the puppies, only to dash off as the latter responded by jumping up and pawing them. In the background watching the tamasha squatted their mothers and aunts, in goatskin capes and astrakhan ear-flaps.

Lamayuru was a mass of chortens of all sizes, shapes, and degrees of decrepitude. Many of them were hollow below, forming archways often decorated with stencil painting on the white plaster, pictures of gods and demons, regents of the quarters, and ornamented without by rough plaster designs of what appeared to

be birds, certainly winged creatures of sorts. In one, too, were crude coloured prints of saints of various colours, and, on the whole, I gathered that Lamayuru was a devout village after its fashion, though its godliness did not go so far as to extend into what we commonly consider the next virtue.

I pottered round the village all the evening until it got dark, and made the acquaintance of an aged man who was making bricks—large ones about two feet long—evidently for another chorten about to be erected. He had a word or two of Hindustani, and with that and a lot of dumb show explained his job.

When I was very young I used to hear about the poor Israelites who were set to make bricks without straw, and never quite saw the connection. It was many years afterwards, when I had to do a job of building in our regimental lines, and found the work delayed owing to the non-arrival of straw, that I caught on to the tag, so to speak. The brick of sun-dried mud used all over the East just cracks to pieces as it dries unless you mix chopped straw with the original mud. My old man here had his heap of straw all right, and his huge bricks were quite solid, useful articles. He was, moreover, building a wall by the simple process of putting

up a double wall of planks, pouring mud between them, and leaving it to dry for the night, when next morning he would repeat the process a layer higher. There is not much difficulty about the housing question in the East, unless it rains, when, of course, the walls and roof tend to become mud once more. However, a goodly amount of straw and cow-dung lend wonderfully lasting qualities to Mother Earth.

Returning to the rest house I found Habib in conversation with the headmen of my ponies of the morrow, for once we left Dras we had to change ponies almost daily. The people who live on the Thibetan trade route have been carriers from time immemorial, and there is an excellent arrangement, called "res," whereby every village along the road has to supply its quota of baggage ponies for the use of travellers at rates fixed annually. The animals only go one stage and then return again, so that there is no necessity to carry forage for them. If, of course, all the quota is already out, you must either bribe some more to come at fancy rates, or sit down until those out return once more.

Here at Lamayuru the res was being temporarily run by men from Zanskar—bigger men than the average Ladakhis, perhaps even a shade more Mongolian, and far wilder-looking. More-

over, they all wore blue caps instead of the more common red ones, and were altogether a picturesque crowd. They were also shrewd beyond the average, not to say ultra-canny, and for once Aziza came off second best in his bargaining for such articles as we used to pick up in the villages to augment our daily rations. It wasn't often that anyone got the better of Aziza, who from his features must be descended straight from the lost tribes.

But I liked my Zanskaris none the less, for I always love the wild and picturesque types that one meets in the more outlandish corners of the world. I don't know why this should be so, but to some of us there is something appealing about the wilder types of humanity. I suppose it is that strain of the savage which is supposed to be at the heart of every Englishman.

The Pathans have few virtues and a string of vices of all sorts, included a gift for the blackest of treachery. And yet you will find that most British officers love serving with them. I suppose it's their natural cheerfulness and their undoubted manly qualities, both traits of the pure savage, which draw one. I know many better fighting men, but I don't think I know any more cheerful soul to wander with, or to

soldier with, than the border tribesman, for all that he may shoot you in the back one fine day.

According to a friend of mine who has spent his life with them, it is deep calling to deep, for he holds with a considerable show of evidence that the border tribes of the North of India are racially more akin to the Englishman than are the Italians or the French, or even the Irish. And inside me I'm not so sure he isn't right, though some of his theories may sound a trifle far-fetched.

And after all the great thing in life, if you can achieve it, is laughter. If you can laugh at everything, and most of all at yourself, you've gone a long way to getting the best of life, and so I suppose it is more natural to prefer to fling your lot among a laughing people of sometimes doubtful trustworthiness than among a dull and unsmiling, but eminently reliable, folk.

Which brings me back to the Zanskaris, who laughed merrily and fleeced Aziza and me, but I parted the best of friends with them all the same. Their cheery company was cheap at the price of the few annas they did us out of, although Aziza and Habib didn't think so.

That night there was a nearly full moon, and

I sat out after dinner talking to Habib about the people of Ladakh, with Lamayuru, castle-like monastery, chorten, and turret ivory white in the moonlight, above slashes of darkest shadow —looking entirely like a picture by Sime, with the clear sky above us over the great silent hills, and far off towards the Photu La, a great storm beating up a side valley, heavy banked clouds and sudden flicker of lightning.

I sometimes think that Ladakh is a very Kingdom of Unreality with its fantastic landscapes, its peculiar rock formations, its quaint peoples. It's all so utterly different from the stereotyped scenery of other parts of the East, palm tree and mosque, mango and temple. And it's not too full; there are wide stretches of hills, mile after mile of solitude, hour after hour of road that passes almost in a dream as you march along by the rushing rivers under the immense heights.

And when at night you sit outside your tents, perhaps, if fate is good, with a glowing camp fire, it all seems more dreamlike than ever, especially on a night like that at Lamayuru, and you think of John Masefield's words as you ponder over the road of the day, and the road of the morrow that lies in the shadowed gorge beyond :

" There is no solace on earth for us—for such as we—
Who search for the hidden beauties that eye may never see.
Only the road and the dawn, the sun, the wind, and the rain,
And the watch-fire under the stars, and sleep, and the road again."

And in the fire-flecked moonlight you feel more than ever that all about you is a dream, that you are seeking, seeking, for something which lies at the end of the road, over the hills ahead, that all about you is unreality really, and that what you want—only you never can quite get that into proper words—lies somewhere further on, " spires over the world's rim."

CHAPTER IX

THE INDUS VALLEY

RIVERS, like passes, have a certain fascination when you cross them, more especially the big, well-known ones which form dividing lines between different peoples and different countries. You don't, of course, get the sudden glimpse of a completely new world that a pass often gives you, but the mere crossing of deep water seems somehow to mark a definite progress, a break with the past, to convey as it were a sense of adventure.

I remember well the first time I crossed the Indus. It was at Attock, where the main line to Peshawar runs out of the Punjab into the North-West Frontier province, and one left a peaceful land for a warlike one where the police go armed, to turn out against raiders from the hills.

The next time of note was by the boat bridges near Dera Ismail Khan on my way to join the Mahsud expedition, when the tribes, who had maintained a comparatively peaceful attitude all during the Great War, were suddenly gal-

"... MANY WAYFARERS THAT DAY ... HEADED BY A PORTLY DAME" (p. 136.) The road from Lamayuru.

"... A LONG RIBBON OF TARNISHED SILVER" (p. 138) The Indus Valley.

"MY ZANSKARIS" (p. 147)

vanised into activity by the outbreak of hostilities against Afghanistan. That year, on the assassination of our staunch supporter, the late Amir, his successor seized the opportunity afforded by a war-weary British Empire busy with demobilization and other post-war problems, to attack India. Possibly he was misled by the Punjab risings and their sequels, and the various symptoms which his advisers read or misread into the acts of the Government of that day.

And since then I have crossed it again and again at different places over its long course between the Attock hills and its Karachi mouth, where it joins the sea, and always somehow there has been to me some new adventure connected with the crossing—maybe the making of new friends, the seeing of new hills, the mere thrill of flying over unknown country when—as happens sometimes—I cross it by air.

And as I set out from Lamayuru, there was one very definite point in my day's march which called to me, the point at which I should first meet the Indus again, 400 miles from where I had last seen it near Attock, and 1,400 miles from its mouth near Karachi, and the thought was like the thought of meeting an old friend in a strange land.

Our road lay first through a strip of cultivated

plateau whence we dropped into a desolate gorge, a real knife-cut cleft with high cliffs on either hand, so that we left the sunlight and dropped steadily downwards in cold shadows, for all that the sky was cloudless blue, and high above us the red-brown peaks were gilded with the morning's rays.

The road was worse than usual for the first couple of hours, since it ran more or less in the stream bed of the waters fed from the snows on either side of the Photu La behind us, and we were perpetually crossing and recrossing the stream, sometimes on tiny bridges, sometimes splashing through the fast-running crystal-clear water.

Then, from a dark gorge on our right, ran in another deeper and faster stream from a regular canyon mouth, and thereafter our path was better, a narrow rock ledge cut out above the foaming rapids, precipitous rise on our left and often sheer drop on our right, but at least dry. And on the opposite bank ran an old and evidently disused track, swept away in places by the shale slides from the hills above, long slips of tumbled, crumpled shale.

A lifeless place with never a tree and but little even in the way of wild rock plants. But there were many wayfarers that day, men and ponies

and tzos, and once a caravan of little donkeys headed by a very portly Thibetan dame, and a young and thin Lama in red cap and flowing, dirty red gown above his tight red leggings, which formed the continuation of his shapeless, rope-soled shoes.

At the second halt we emerged into a wider space, where another big stream joined, again on the right bank, the Wanla Chu, and we came out into open sunlight by a stone-walled plantation of silver-grey willows, where in a little mud-hut lived the solitary man who seemed to tend it.

Leaving him, we crossed the joint streams by the usual frail wooden bridge, and continued our way down a rather wider valley, but in sunlight now, since we had turned sharp left, and the sun was now behind us. Then, suddenly, the telegraph wires swung up sharply over a gaunt, saw-toothed ridge of naked rock, and although Sidika maintained that our road must still lie down the valley, I insisted on climbing the ridge, since I knew that the wire ran to Leh and would probably take the shorter route.

And so it proved, for at the end of a steep scramble we crossed the ridge by a tiny little pass, and saw opening wide before us a great, sunlit, sandy valley flanked by gaunt, towering

hills of savage rock, and running down the centre a long ribbon of tarnished silver, the Indus, still 500 miles from its source in Greater Thibet. And there I stayed for a while drinking in the scene, the wide, desolate valley showing far off a patch of green, which must be Khalatse on the Leh road, all about us bare, jagged hills exactly like the hills that seem to flank the Indus for all the rest of its 1,400-mile course south-west to the sea, and nowhere the littlest field or hut or sign of human life.

Then, picking up our sticks once more, we tumbled down the steep rocky slope until we reached the valley floor, and followed it, rejoining the track again shortly, where it ran, a whiter ribbon in the white waste of sand and stones, in the white-hot glare of sunlight.

Another three-quarters of an hour saw us crossing the Indus on a modern suspension bridge under the shadow of a great mud-built castle, very mediæval in appearance to the uninitiated; indeed, in one book on Little Thibet I have seen its photo labelled "Castle Brag Nag."

But Castle Brag Nag is not there at all, being nearly two miles further up-stream, and only tiny ruins on a high rock at that. The deserted fort under whose walls we crossed the muddy, fast-racing torrent of the border river of India

proper is a modern Dogra structure of the last century, though now it is deserted and no sound of trumpet challenges the lonely wayfarer who approaches.

But I can forgive the author of that book for letting his or her dreams run away from strict fact. Was it not Sadi—poet of dreamers—who wrote several hundred years ago:

> "Better the fiction resembling the truth,
> Than the truth dissevered from the imagination."

After all, in such a land of dreams, to find Castle Brag Nag, built by King Naglug to guard the bridge he made over the Indus, carving upon the rock above his threats against any who should destroy this, the only bridge, for hundreds of miles, is that not something for which one might be forgiven a little topographical error of a couple of miles?

Brag Nag, which means "Black Rock," Castle had a chequered history, too. The last occasion on which it achieved notoriety was when some of the Thibetans rose against Zorawar Singh in the forties of the last century on his annexation of Ladakh, and slew the garrison of one of his posts—Brag Nag itself as far as I remember.

Zorawar Singh dealt strongly with the mal-

contents—he had the fainéant King of Ladakh very firmly under his thumb—and as for the two ringleaders, he made an example of them. He gathered together under pain of death the whole of the local population, and pitched his marquee and that of the aged King upon an open space, with the cowed populace around. Then he produced the two rebel leaders, and being for his race and age a comparatively humane person, offered them large doses of ganja (hemp), which is a narcotic, pointing out that by eating it they would suffer less. History doesn't relate if they did so or not, but let us hope they were sensible.

Then the chief executioner proceeded to remove the first man's nose and ears and tongue and hands, the second losing only nose and tongue and ears, the stumps being dipped into boiling butter at each stage of the operation. This sounds a refinement of torture, but as I have said, for an Oriental despot, Zorawar Singh was rather notably humane, and boiling butter is the Dogra remedy for severe wounds, as it tends, or is believed to tend, to check the loss of blood. Finally the executioner flung the bound and mutilated men rolling in the dust among the crowd. The one who kept his hands managed to survive, the other didn't.

Then the Dogra general ordered one of the hands to be fastened on the bridge at Brag Nag as a warning. Only the despatch rider who carried it thither arriving late at night, carelessly left it lying about, and according to him, the local people stole it. Their contention was—quite literally—that it was the cat. Knowing their masters, however, they gathered in fear and trembling to decide what they should do about it, and fortunately remembered that an aged man had died that day and was not yet buried. So next morning the bridge was duly adorned with a rebel hand, and whoever the late owner really was, it probably served its turn equally well.

On the whole Zorawar Singh, with his hemp and his boiling butter, seems a more humane person than certain Western potentates of slightly earlier days. In Elizabethan times, London Bridge was decorated in similar and even more revolting fashion, and there was no narcotic provided at Tyburn.

Having satisfied my critical—over-critical, according to some folk—mind that the present Indus crossing fort is not Brag Nag, and, nevertheless, dream wandering over the place in most uncritical fashion, I continued on my way out of the shadowy walls into the vivid

sunlight and the stony waste once more, and passing at last by a long *māné* wall, came into the green freshness of Khalatse, upon whose outskirts lies a delightful plantation of willows, at one end of which is a bungalow belonging to the Moravian missionaries.

Not liking to intrude upon strangers at lunch time, I passed the bungalow and halted in some smiling fields of waving barley, shaded everywhere by apricot trees heavy with golden fruit, which I plundered until I could eat no more, and then dozed, lying at the edge of a rippling water channel.

Presently up came my ponies, and Habib told me they would halt at the other side of the village, where there were a big tank and a rest house. So I followed him through the narrow streets of tiny houses and tumbled chortens, with fruit trees everywhere.

Khalatse seemed to dress more gaily than other places—perhaps it is more prosperous; it certainly looked so from its orchards and fields —and there was a variety in the hue of the women's dresses, many wearing a sort of plum colour instead of the duller reds and browns and blacks of the earlier stages. Lamas a many, too, in red gowns and caps. Here, as elsewhere on the road, we were greeted by all

and sundry with the *jule*, which replaces the *salaam* of Musalman countries. Most pleasant indeed was it to be greeted by women as well as men, instead of seeing the women draw their veils across their faces when the stranger rides by, as happens in most other Oriental countries. I have certain prejudices, and that happens to be one of them—an extreme dislike to Oriental conventions on women's behaviour.

The tank to which we made our way was a charming place, shaded by big trees over water of the most wonderful jade colour—the colour of the high mountain lakes—of the glacier waters whence indeed it came, in a long channel from the hills above—and there we sat and rested while the men ate their midday food, the Zanskaris their barley meal mixed in the little flat bowls, and my own men their usual chupattis and boiled rice. The Zanskaris also had a brew of some fermented liquor which Habib showed to me as a curiosity—a colourless liquid said to be potent, but I didn't risk taking it.

The half-hour's halt over, we gathered up *yeh log* from the edge of the tank, repacked them in their basket, and set out once more upon our way to Nurla, which I had selected for the night's stopping place.

The fruit orchards and the shady trees ceased abruptly as once more we stepped out into the glaring expanse of rock and sand, passing a few *mānés* walls, and a tumble-down chorten or two on the edge of the great hills. One is sometimes almost inclined to believe the story that the Baluch tells of the origin of his country, which Ladakh resembles in every way, save only for its laughing, unfanatical people. The Baluch says that when God had finished making the world He picked up all the odds and ends of stone and debris that were left over, and flung them down in a heap, which heap is Baluchistan. But if He really did so He makes amends daily by taking His brush and splashing into it all the colours from His marvellous palette, so that at dawn and evening men shall remember Him when they see the hills change from bare rock into colours such as no artist can ever hope to copy. He puts into the gaunt rocks all the translucent pinks and blues and greens, gold and rose and amber, that you find only in nature and never in art, the hues of butterflies' wings, and wild flowers, of the sea mists, and of far-off hills and rainbows, colours that you can never reach, since when you get there they've always receded into a new distance, as if to remind you that the perfection of beauty is not here in the

world, but further on at the end of the long road which is life.

We sidled past the edge of a steep ravine on a narrow ledge cut out of a shale slide, and thereafter traversed a bare space of tumbled stony ground until we came to a high rock, upon which were the ruins of a stone-built fort at a point where the river narrows in to sweep through a gorge. Not Brag Nag either, though it might well have been, but that place of legend now lay behind us on the steep hillside, under which nestles the green oasis of Khalatse.

And thereafter our road became a narrow path of built-up stone along the steep river-bank under the cliffs, hour after hour and mile after mile along the edge of the fast-flowing muddy torrent of the Indus, sometimes more or less unbroken sheet of wide water, sometimes flickering splash of breakers over hidden boulders. The afternoon sun beat down through the thin air, though here we were comparatively low, only just on 10,000 feet above the distant sea, and the heat flickered back from naked rock and dazzling sand, so that Dog Bill's tongue grew longer and longer, and his jerky little trot grew quicker and quicker in his endeavours to keep his pads off the hot ground. At last he could bear it no more, and shot yelping over the edge

into a quiet pool, where he lay for ten minutes, refusing to come out, absorbing moisture through every pore, to make up for what he had sweated out through his tongue.

Then, as I began to weary of the road, we swung up a rather steeper incline into a long, wide plateau high above the river, and found ourselves among terraced fields and wide stretches of irrigated land, clusters of fruit trees and orchards golden with apricot—Nurla.

I stopped to rob a tree or two, for the sight of ripe fruit in this bare country was too much for me, and then I followed Sidika on until near the centre of the cultivated area we came upon the rest house, a little two-roomed structure perched on the edge of the high conglomerate cliff above the river, flanked by the big courtyard of the serai. An aged man hastened forth to greet us and began putting the place to rights, shifting the rickety deck chairs and hauling out a real spring bed, for the Assistant Resident had recently passed that way, embellishing the rest houses *en route* with metal beds in lieu of the wood and webbing ones beloved of the East, whose holes and crannies form such excellent breeding places for the smaller carnivora.

The ponies were not far behind, and after their arrival, a wash, a change of clothing, and

hot tea were welcome, for the road had been long and dry. I paid off the Zanskaris, and they left with smiles and doubtless tongues well in cheeks at having done us over the prices of the eggs and milk and other oddments we had bought from them.

After tea I took my gun and sallied forth in search of rock pigeon rather than pay the absurd price that the Nurla people wanted for their fowls, for I have always a fellow-feeling with the suburban lady who will spend 3*s.* 6*d.* on taxis and trains, not to mention the additional price of lunch out, in order to buy two yards of something at Selfridge's at 1*s.* 11¾*d.*, rather than be diddled by the local shop who wants to charge her 2*s.* 1*d.* A Scotch grandmother probably accounts for this tendency of mine.

I followed the low ridge above Nurla for a weary hour, but saw no sign of bird life whatsoever. On the other hand, I was more than repaid for my walk by the view of Nurla, one long expanse of vivid green between the naked brown hills, fields of emerald with here and there the darker green of trees, fields laced with the silver of water channels, and clusters of little mud houses whose flat roofs were golden with apricots spread out to dry, or sometimes vivid scarlet with heaps of chilli pods. Across

the unseen river which lay in the gorge below showed a long water channel cut out of the hillside, dotted here and there with occasional dwarf willows, and at one point were a few goats and a woman following a hair-broad path across the face of a long precipitous slope of bluish rock.

At last I dropped down from my perch on a rock outcrop, where I had sat down to smoke a cigarette and watch the changing lights on the hills as the sun sank to the jagged horizon behind me, slithered down a steep slope of broken rocks to the last of the Nurla hamlets, and made my way under a big clump of mulberry and walnut trees into the little village. There a red Lama was sitting on a wall talking to two or three Thibetan dames in glory of red turquoise-studded beragh and astrakhan ear-flaps; and some little children in nightgown-like shirts and queer caps, with flaps tied under their podgy chins, were playing in the dust.

And so home along the track above the river, as the shadows lengthened and only the peaks were now golden with the last rays of the dying sun. The grandmother's strain was in the ascendant that evening, for since no pigeons were forthcoming I dined off poached eggs and rice pudding, rather than pay the extra fourpence

which the Nurla folk had added—unjustly, I considered—to the price of their skinny fowls.

Dog Bill was a source of trouble that evening, for he had recovered from the day's march, and was evidently amorously inclined. He gets that way upon occasions, and at Gund in the Sind valley had caused much trouble owing to the blandishments of a black lady—a rather prepossessing creature considering she was only a village dog. She drew Bill from the paths of virtue, even from the winding path which leads from Kangan to Gund and which we were following into shady arbours of dalliance among the fields. I wouldn't have minded at other times and places, but I was afraid of letting him out of my sight in a land where the dogs are large and fierce and in a pack will tear a fox-terrier to pieces, and there were several such dogs hanging round the lady, who like many of her betters evidently preferred breeding to mere brawn.

His disappointment in that direction when he was finally chastised for running away three times, and led off at last on a chain, evidently weighed upon his mind, and there seemed to be other attractions among the pack that bayed at the moon in the Nurla serai. So, finally, he had to be chained to the foot of the iron bed

which I had placed, or rather caused to be placed, upon the verandah.

Talking of "caused to be placed," I would advise all those—perhaps well-meaning persons—who are actively interested in the politics of India to take a short course in the grammar of the various vernaculars of that continent. They differ at many points, but at one they are almost unanimous, in what is called the "causal" verb.

Take as an example the verb *rakhna*, to place. *Rakhwāna* is to tell someone to make someone else put something somewhere. And so with practically every word one can think of. The mere reading of the paradigm gives a very vivid picture often seen in the East—a string of people lazily moving at the order of a fat man squatting in a chair, his heels drawn up to the seat of the chair, which he only sits in—not because he prefers it to the ground—but because the sahib uses chairs, and therefore they must be dignified articles.

You can see the word being passed along down the chain, until eventually it reaches the bottom link, who, being like the proverbial cat of the office boy story, has no one underneath to kick or order, and so perforce has to perform the necessary work.

The peasantry, of course, don't go in much for such finesse of speech, because, as perhaps I have mentioned before, they are excellent people—industrious and frugal in all matters save the weddings of their children, for which they will run headlong into debt. It is in other strata that you notice the causal verbs in frequent use—the men of cities, the vakils, babus, and the like, those in fact who from generations, perhaps from all time, have refrained from bodily toil, and still more from bodily danger such as battle.

Ghani being the offspring of fighting men, was merely told to *rakhna* the bed on the verandah, but to the servant of a town-bred babu I fancy the word would have been *rakhwāna*, and the chokidar or one of the pony men would have had to do the job. I don't have to use causal verbs to Ghani, he gets the direct imperative of the simple form, and things move, for he is the modern East of the kind that is much to be admired, the kind that does all manner of things with its own hands, from mending motor-cars to shovelling snow when we get buried in the winter months. The only thing he takes no interest in is reading and writing, which in his case is really a pity, since it keeps him and his like at the mercy of the babu and the banniah.

I suppose there is a method in their apparent madness, for when the village greybeards sit down and contemplate the results of so-called education, they probably feel rather strongly on the matter of reading and writing, since to our peasantry of Northern India—like to ourselves—manliness still counts for far more than quill-driving or fluent speech. Only I wish they would endeavour to combine the two things, instead of regarding them as incompatible, and so leaving the field of political power clear to those whose ancestors long ago, from lack of manliness, were driven to the quill, and now find that it is indeed a mightier weapon than the sword, which openly they despise, and secretly dread so very much.

I suppose I am a "diehard," but I always like the man who can use his hands as well as his brain, for I think life is meant to be always a battle, and that he who is not willing to fight if need be has no right to live save only on sufferance. And a man who is willing to live on sufferance is to me not a man at all. Modern life demands brain-work in ever-increasing quantities, but England only remains England because the clerk can drop his pen and his ledger and shoulder a rifle with any man. Whereas the East, at present anyway, with

certain honourable exceptions, can only handle one or the other.

And with such thoughts in my head I watched Abdul Ghani[1] *rakhoing* the bed on to the verandah and moving the heavy yakhdans about, and thanked fate that my lot lies now among men in the more virile parts of the Orient, and not among the palm trees and miasmic cities of the south.

[1] Eight months after this was written, Abdul Ghani lost his life in very bravely trying to save my motor-car from a smash, when it ran backwards off a slope. R.I.P.

CHAPTER X

FROM NURLA TO NYEMU

ALL through my journey up, I was pondering how I could find an extra day or two for my stop in Leh, since unfortunately my leave was short, and the latter part of it was earmarked to tramp the Kashmir mountains and the high valleys with a friend of mine whose leave began later than mine. Days of hard marching had begun to replace some of the soft tissue produced by many months in an office chair by what seemed to be muscle or something like it, and so that day at Nurla I decided I would put in a double march the next day.

I could, of course, have ridden all through, but my pride forbade that. Two hundred miles of the outward journey had to be done on my feet, no matter what happened, and I resolutely determined that on the return journey I would double march almost every day, that is, do two stages daily instead of the normal one.

I made the necessary arrangements with Habib that evening at Nurla, and as food loads were lightening, by a rearrangement thereof

we managed to save one pony, and hired two more, so that when we set out from Nurla we had two ponies to ride out of our original strength, while Habib, mounted on the third, had gone ahead to arrange for fresh animals to be ready waiting for us at the next stage, Saspula.

Leaving one pony for Ghani, the cook, and Kadra to ride in turn, I mounted Sidika on the second, and in the pleasant coolness of the morning marched out of the Nurla apricot orchards and took the path along the Indus valley to Saspula. There was a fresh breeze and going was good, so that I managed to do four hours and a quarter without a halt, covering well over fourteen miles in the time along a very desolate road, passing neither house nor tree in the whole distance. Once only did we stop for a couple of minutes, when we ran into a sahib returning from the Chang Chen Mo beyond Leh, whither he had been after big game. His outfit was travel-worn, clothes and chaplis alike speaking to many miles of marching, and luck had not been too favourable, for on the second pony reposed his bag—a somewhat small ammon head. He was cheerful, but not over-bright, not surprising considering the miles he had covered for that particular trophy.

Among his ponies were two or three Chang

Tung puppies, led by his men, rough-haired beasts that in time would grow into the great dogs of the nomads of the high Thibetan plateau, which are as savage and as powerful as any dog I have ever met. Two are considered a fair match for a bear or leopard at any time, and one can dispose of a man. They are greatly in demand by shikaris and others returning to Kashmir, since they are the perfect watch-dog, only you can never make them live in a house. Neither they nor their owners have ever lived in one since the dawn of history, and they fear it as a trap when night draws on, though they will come indoors by day.

The outskirts of Saspula, which showed as a great, long plateau covered with cultivation, were marked by a chorten gate, whereunder one had to pass, a spired archway surmounted by the thirteen rings which mark the ages, painted in gaudy colours and embellished with the first letters of each of the sacred words, *Om Mane Padme Hum.*

Passing under it we left the great river we had followed steadily for the last two and a half marches, and turned rather inland among the fields, just near a very narrow bridge swung high above the torrent, on which a woman and a flock of goats were imitating Blondin. I

suppose if you are born and bred to that class of thing you don't mind it, but it always makes me a trifle squeamish, and I have perhaps a better head for heights than most folk.

The rest house where Habib was to meet us with the new ponies lay at the further end of Saspula's two miles or so of fields, and making our way thither we came upon a delightful little orchard full of apple and apricot trees, the last being golden with ripe and fairly sweet fruit. Looking around for the owner, I spotted a most benevolent yellow Lama, and hailed him, pointing to the apricots. We had no common speech, but he understood and led me away to a shady corner where there were even better ones to be picked, and seizing a branch shook it until there was a golden rain of fruit.

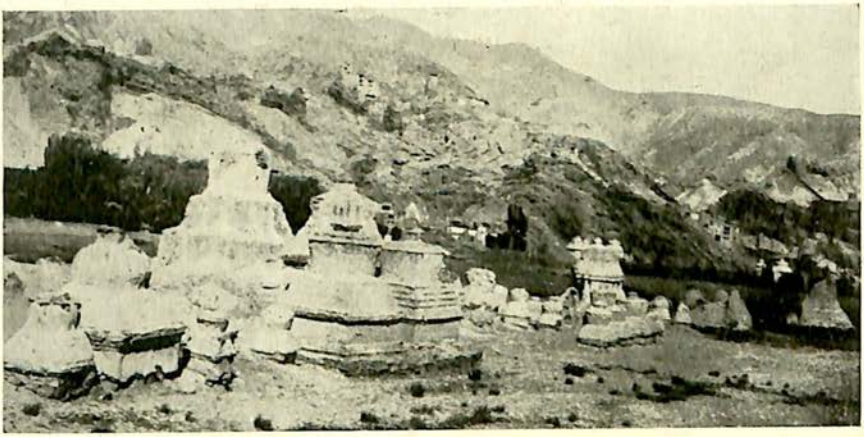
There are two sects of Lamas in Thibet, the red and the yellow, but both wear the same coloured clothes, namely red; it is only the colour of the cap which differs. The yellow Lamas are the reformed sect, or the existing examples of it, for the great reforms made by the saintly Tsong Kapa—of whom more anon—petered out more or less at the change of hue of the cap.

He took a great interest in my wrist watch—my yellow Lama that is, not Tsong Kapa, who is, I trust, in Nirvana, for I have a reverence for

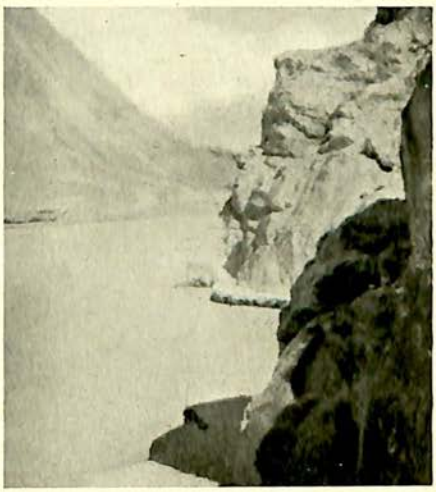
the old monk—and asked all sorts of questions about it, which neither Sidika nor I could understand. But we laughed together, which is always a form of speech, until finally I gave him a small silver coin, and we parted with great show of friendliness, Sidika carrying my sun helmet, which I rarely wear, brimming high with luscious apricots.

We reached the rest house at last, and here found Habib and new ponies. Since our own had not yet arrived—two and a half miles an hour steady was all I could ever get out of them—I decided to lunch in the rest house garden, for the house itself was stuffy and, moreover, actually on one edge of the serai. Furthermore, food of the kind one takes on trek always tastes much better if eaten out in the open. Curry puffs and hard-boiled eggs, Aziza's sugary "flitters," and the crust of last night's loaf are excellent food, but don't taste half so nice if eaten off plates on a table, however rickety the table may be.

I demanded the key of the garden, and was told that the holder of it had gone out into the village, and was not to be found, which at first glance seemed unfortunate, for the two halves of the gate were secured together by a most enormous padlock of the Thibetan stamp, quite six inches across.



"BASGU . . . CITY OF GOBLIN TOWERS . . ." (p. 163)



THE INDUS VALLEY ROAD UNDER THE CLIFFS (p. 155)

"A ROAD FLANKED CONTINUALLY BY CHORTENS" (p. 163)

The Thibetan padlock is the quaintest article, and the key is even more so. I love studying the chatelaines that men and women alike wear, and seeking always to find a bigger key than any met with hitherto. Some of them must weigh as much as a pound, I should say. The Thibetan padlock has no wards in our sense, there is nothing to turn, the insertion of the key forces aside great heavy flat springs which hold the hasp part secured, thus allowing you to withdraw it, and some of the superior ones have as many as six springs in them. But the design never varies, and the better the lock the larger it is, and larger also the key, until you reach something which would make a fair-sized screw spanner look rather a childish toy.

A crowd gathered to watch us, but, of course, no one could open the padlock—was it not a "Government" garden?—even if there was a key to fit. So at last in desperation I did the Sampson act, lifting the two halves of the gate off the hooks whereon they hung, and entered, the crowd watching me open-mouthed at such daring.

The Thibetan is honest, which is rare in the East, and what is rarer still, he is said to be truthful. So on the whole padlocks are perhaps not very necessary. Still the idea of a gate which was secured for appearance' sake by an

imposing lock, but could still be quietly lifted out of the way, rather tickled me. But then there is a lot in the atmosphere of locks, as one can see by the ridiculous ones which adorn desks and ladies' bureaux and such like. One opens a drawer with no guilty feelings, but to force or pick even the simplest kind of lock conjures up all sorts of visions of criminality. Which really comes down to the fact that the placing of a lock on something is for an unlettered people equivalent to a written request, "please don't open"—an old idea that still survives among us lettered folk of the West.

I spent a pleasant half-hour in that garden of tall poplars, lying in the sun-dappled shade of their foliage. I sometimes think that all trees have a certain amount of personality, and always they speak to me of places I know, so that when I meet a pine I hear of the Murree hills, even though we may be hundreds of miles away.

Poplars generally tell me of the wilder places we know, of the irrigation channels under the Baluch hills, of the Frontier water-courses, and willows speak to me of the softness of the Kashmir valleys, of the dreamy rivers, and the little rippling streams among the rice-fields. And when I meet the birches they talk to me of the

passes and the high snows. It is nice to have friends like that, for it stops you feeling lonely if you can find friendly faces and hear voices of greeting almost wherever you may roam.

So when Ghani came to collect *yeh log*, who were busily scratching in a dried-up water channel, I was sorry to leave the Saspula poplars, which were rather conversational, and seemed to know all sorts of places and people that I know and hold very dear. Still the road lay before us, so bidding the graceful poplars good-bye, I called to Dog Bill, fast asleep on a patch of turf in the sun, and followed Ghani to where the new ponies were waiting.

It was my turn to ride and therefore I rode, and despite the fact that the saddle was only a pack-saddle of wood over which I spread my mackintosh, and the stirrups were tied on to odd length pieces of rope, I was rather glad to ride for the first half-hour, for I had eaten a good lunch, while the sun was warm and the garden dreamy, so that I didn't feel at all inclined for exertion.

For half a mile or so we wound our way among fields and then out into desolate stony hills again as we headed up a narrow valley down which ran a rippling water-course, splashing over the boulders in the vivid sunlight, with

high above us on the hills in front the little cairns of stones that tell you there is a pass ahead.

We climbed steadily for a long hour among lifeless hills, and then came out into a broad, hill-ringed plateau which stretched on into the distance, to where some way off I could make out a dim stretch of green which must mark the point where our road should rejoin the Indus valley. Beyond that again, faint blue and white on the distant horizon under the blue sky, showed high snow mountains where the Thibet road runs on, miles and miles away, until it turns south-east to the Himalayas again, and so in the end comes back to civilisation at Simla.

Weary at last, both of the pack-saddle and the pony's slow pace, for on that saddle trotting was out of the question, I dismounted and sat in the lee of a small pile of *māné* stones to smoke a pipe until Sidika and the pony man caught me up. It was with considerable gladness that I surrendered the mount to Sidika, who being an Oriental was quite happy with the awful wooden saddle, though he was doubtful as ever about riding while I walked, and wanted to lead the beast, until I insisted on his mounting.

Another mile or so and then all unexpectedly we dropped down a steep, narrow nullah on to

the most picturesque of places, the village which the Thibetans call Basgu, and I call "The City of Goblin Towers." It is a cluster of cliff-perched buildings, ruined monasteries, and little castles, knocked to bits in the old Balti wars, brown mud towers and tiny white houses hanging above the vivid green of the fields which splashed so suddenly the brown waste lands all about us, and the lower ground at the entrance to the nullah wherein we stood was a mass of chortens old and new.

To our left ran a ravine rich with willow and poplar, which formed the road to a cluster of small villages, thickly populated for that part of the world, and as we reached its junction with Basgu, passing over the sun-splashed, laughing water we came upon a regular halting place, where a crowd of long-gowned Thibetans were watering their pack animals, and drinking from a crystal-clear spring that gushed from a little stone conduit in a bank of turf.

We stayed there a little while, watching the groups of men and animals, until our own beasts caught us up, and then we pushed forward again through Basgu village, the lower part, among walled orchards of fruit trees, on a road that seemed flanked continually by chortens of all sizes and long *māné* walls.

Near one of these I passed a lady riding, whom I would dearly have loved to photograph if only my camera had been handy. She was richly dressed in plum colour, and though her head-dress was swathed in folds of muslin to keep off the dust of the road, I could catch through the muslin the glint of very gorgeous golden ornaments over the big astrakhan ear-flaps. She swung her mount on the left of the *māné* wall, leaving it on her right, and rode past me standing on the other side, looking like a princess out of a fairy book, clean-cut features and haughty eyes, well-shaped mouth and a clear, fair skin.

After that we got into a long, open, sandy plain, dotted occasionally with great chortens and barred with a long *māné* wall with chortens at either end—a great wide plain that made uncomfortable going, since the sand was full of little pebbles, which worked their way between one's chapli soles and one's feet. At the far end showed the low line of green of Nyemu, which we reached somewhat footsore and weary about five o'clock, glad indeed to off-load in the big plantation of cotton poplar around the rest house.

After tea I took the three dogs for a stroll, and Dog Bill disgraced himself by vanishing

into a field and refusing to come out when called—a bad example for the two puppies, and one that led to chastisement when I eventually did catch him. I never discovered what the attraction was, but I think it was merely to show his independence, for he gets like that sometimes, and I have seen him pondering seriously whether the subsequent punishment will be worth the pleasure of a night out. He ponders quite a long time, and you can really see him thinking. He might save his brain, since the end is always the same—a little white figure shooting out of the room when someone opens the door and he thinks you aren't looking —a vanishing blur of white into the moonlight or the starlight—he never does it on rainy nights—and a rather subdued little dog who returns with the morning tea, and spends the next day on the end of a chain just to learn him. He really is very human is Bill Dog, and I sympathise entirely with his point of view, though discipline has to be maintained—more especially when there are two pups to educate in the bungalow.

I slept in the garden all night—for the bungalow seemed depressing, although it was a new one and rather palatial in its way. It was a perfect night and I lay there watching the Scorpion

swing out over the western hills, all the poplars ghostly silver in the moonlight above the heaped white drifts of their scattered wealth of cotton, which looked like snow, and between their silvery, shadowy stems over the low stone wall that surrounds the plantation showed a vista of fantastic creviced hills, slashed with the black shadows of rock ravines.

I love sleeping out under the stars—I once did it for four years, with very few nights' break when the rains were on. Of course, long periods like that are only possible in the more equable climates such as Central India. The Punjab cold makes it quite impossible in winter, while English rain would hardly ever allow one to do it even for a clear month. There is some magic about the night which one loses altogether when one has to sleep under a roof—even in the very minor degree of a tent roof. I don't know what the magic is that makes you wake in the morning fresh and clear-eyed and all alive with the sheer joy of living, but there it is. It may be the stars or the great distances of the night sky which soothe the over-wearied heart and brain, fussed about hundreds of daily trifles. There are a lot of things about nature which we haven't yet found out, or else have forgotten altogether under the conditions of modern life.

All I know is that the magic is always there, and it was specially heavy that night at Nyemu, for I awoke of myself at half-past five—before even the punctual Ghani with my tea could wake me, and sat up in the cool freshness of the dawn to listen to the men moving about as they got busy preparing for this our last march, which should see us into Leh before the day was out.

The moon was just disappearing into the hills, all shadows under the dim vault of the sky, and there was the faintest glow in the East where the sun was as yet hidden behind the mountains. The stables and servants' quarters were black masses of shadows, save at one point where the dancing red glow of a fire played upon Aziza's pirate features as he blew up the flames, while loose-robed, felt-booted men moved noiselessly about him, carrying pack-saddles and ropes.

And then came Ghani to tell me it was time to get up, for they wanted to pack my bed, so I went indoors to dress, passing from the magic of the dawn and the sky into the rather stuffy bungalow, where *yeh log* were making noises in their basket demanding to be allowed out, and Dog Bill, who has no illusions about sleeping under the stars, was stretching lazily on his blanket in the corner of the low-roofed room.

CHAPTER XI

WE REACH LEH

By seven o'clock we were under way, and leaving behind us the shadowy plantation which hid the rest house and the stone-built stables and outhouses of the Nyemu serai, we made our way through little fields intersected with water channels, along a sunken road which debouches among ruined chortens, to lead us into a waterless, winding, stony ravine, where for an hour we plodded steadily upwards among barren hills, sharp cut, of red and brown sandstone, furrowed and creviced everywhere with fantastic slits and cuts.

At last we emerged at the top, and came out upon a long plateau, dry and naked and bare, with high upon our right the great glittering peak of Mount Sacrifice, whose 20,000-foot summit overhung us perhaps 9,000 feet in the distance, a white sugar-loaf among tremendous blue-shadowed mountains of lesser height. Another hour, and we slid down into a green ravine that opened before us suddenly, pleasant sparkling water, and plantations of dwarf willows, with

banks all overgrown by coarse green bushes. Here were several groups of men watering their animals, and a little party of Balti coolies carrying loads of salt tied up in goatskins.

They carry the salt all the way to Skardu and beyond from Leh, well over a hundred miles, for man transport is cheap, whereas to load it on animals would raise the price too much. In Leh also they buy their few luxuries, block tea from China and other such little things as cannot be obtained locally. Then, girding up their loins, they take the long, weary road back down the Indus valley, plodding a dozen miles and then halting for the night in the lee of a rock.

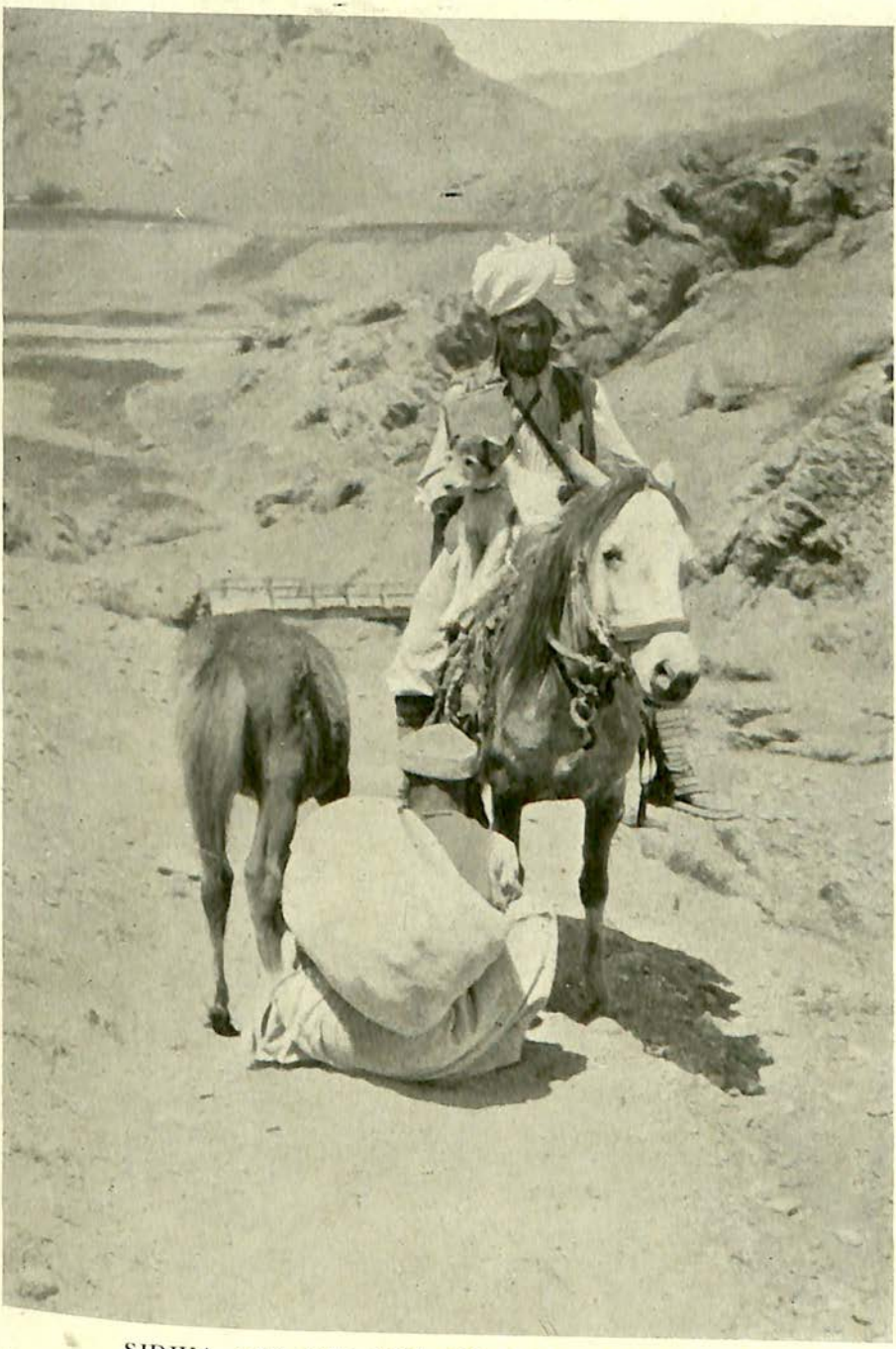
A quaint Mongolian-featured folk, with smooth faces and long love locks under the little round felt skull-caps with the folded edges, loose skirt-like garments of colourless, coarse cotton cloth above the shapeless leg wear that ends in the clumsy felt boots, with the sole of leather pulled up all round, so that it overwraps the edges much as do the soles of the seaside shoes of canvas and rubber, which I believe to-day are known as "plimsolls," though when I was very young they were always called "sandshoes."

A patient, hard-working folk, trudging their couple of hundred miles for a gain of a shilling

or two, only taking off their loads at the nightly halt or the midday meal, since while on the road they rest by sitting standing, as it were, on the crutch-shaped stick they carry, which must have been the original ancestor of the modern shooting stick with fold-up seat that turns one from a biped into a tripod, and so rests one's leg muscles a trifle.

The Tharu ravine was inviting, for the day was getting warm, and Sidika said the ponies would halt there. He himself was riding again that morning, and behind us in the distance—a dark spot on the glaring stones—I could just make out Habib ambling along on the second riding pony, my umbrella as ever spread aloft to shade his countenance from the sun.

But I had another halting place in view—one of a certain significance—the Phayang Dokpo as the map called it, though the names on the map of that part of the world never seem to coincide with the names given by the local inhabitants to the places indicated. But the topographical feature called Phayang Dokpo was a similar but larger ravine than the Tharu, and it lay a few miles further on, while its significance—a purely private one to me and of no interest to anyone else—was that it would mark the end of the 200th mile on foot since I



170] SIDIKA AND DOG BILL ON A DOUBLE MARCH

set out from Gandarbal, the best part of two weeks before. I decided, therefore, that I would lunch at Phayang Dokpo and nowhere else.

Sidika sighed somewhat as I threw away the end of my cigarette, stirred Dog Bill to activity with the point of my khudstick, and set out up the steep, winding path which led us out of the ravine on the opposite side on to another long bare, stony plain. But he pushed his pony onward, and was probably glad that he was riding that day.

I know a lot of bare, dead places, but that little stretch of some three miles between the two ravines was as naked of life and graciousness as any I have ever met. Even the great plain of Quetta—the *dasht-i-bedaulat*—the "Plain of Poverty," would seem fertile beside it. Glaring surface of grey and brown dotted with the long line of telegraph poles, far off to one side a long *māné* wall, and a cluster of three forgotten chortens, and then still further off the faint, hazy green that marked Spitog, where the road leaves the Indus valley for Leh. About and beyond Spitog were the shimmering curves of the Indus once more, for just now we were some way from the stream, which ran in a deep valley a few miles to our right. Lest the glare and the heat should not be enough for us the

gods who look after travellers, ordaining all things in due proportion, loosed upon us a swarm of biting flies, smaller than mosquitoes but bigger than sandflies, that hovered in a film about us.

You see, the goal lay only a dozen miles ahead under the great shadowed hills, a goal that we had come very far to see, and without that little spurt at the end among the flies and gritty, tiring sand through which we trudged, our minds would not have been so properly tuned to appreciate what we did come to. From a shady road and a luxurious Rolls-Royce, for instance, Leh would probably seem very ordinary. So also would have been the Phayang Dokpo ravine into which we at last descended hot, weary, much bitten about the faces, necks, arms, and in my case knees, and with very sand-reddened eyes.

But to us it was the direct descendant of Eden as we loosed the pony to graze and dumped Sidika's rucksack on a turf bank by a sparkling stream under thick willows, and stayed a while watching Dog Bill submerged to the neck in the shadow of a glinting foam-washed rock under the sun-dappled shadows of the leafy bank.

I ate my midday meal leisurely, and then I lay upon the turf and considered the road that

lay behind, with just a little glow at my heart at the thought of the 200 miles I had trodden honestly—flowered roads under pine trees, rocky roads in mossy shadows of silver birches, high passes and snow-fields, winding ways among terraced fields, stony tracks among gaunt, bare hills. I had ridden some more miles as well, but I don't count those and I didn't count them then. And feeling that there was no point in adding any more miles to the count, since it would be but a bare dozen at most, I decided that I would ride the rest of the way into Leh.

So when the ponies caught us up and passed us, all eager to get through the long march and reach a place where we would off-saddle once for all for several days at least, I climbed on to Sidika's animal, and set out once more for the last lap. It was the slowest and worst of all the ponies we ever hired, and I rode it side-saddle—alternate sides each quarter of an hour—hanging my spare leg over the arch of the wooden pack-saddle on which Sidika had thoughtfully spread my raincoat.

A long hour of sand and glare and grit and flies, and then down to the grass flats by the Indus, with ponies a many and sheep grazing by the fast-rushing streams on the sodden turf.

We splashed our way through the main channel with the bare-legged pony man guiding us—I left Sidika on the hither bank, and sent the pony back for him to save his footwear—up a bank, round a corner of rock, leaving the hill monastery of Spitog to our right, and then lo, long vista of bare, sandy plain shelving gently upwards, and at the far end of it a long sweep of green hemmed in behind by a great curve of hills—Leh, which is the capital of Lamaland.

It looked as if you could touch it—cliff-hung palace and long line of poplars, white house and chorten, *māné* walls and monasteries. But knowing the air of the high places—the Indus we had just left flows at 11,000 feet at Spitog—I said to myself "at least an hour." Actually it was nearer an hour and a half before we were well into the green fringe of Leh, irrigated fields and trees, and so came at last through a narrow lane into the tall gate which opens upon a regular *place de ville*, row of tall poplars shading little tiny wooden-shuttered shops on either hand. This is Leh bazaar, which is also Leh polo-ground on gala days, a wide sunlit street closed at one end by the big gate which I had entered, and at the other by a network of little alley-ways, which lead up to the cluster of tiny buildings clinging to the skirts of the

great six-storied palace that towers above. This is the residence of the old hereditary Kings of Ladakh—the "*nam gayal*" dynasty, the "ever-victorious" house whose last scion, a pensioner of the Kashmir State, lives in obscure poverty at Tsog village, but sometimes visits his palace in the winter months.

I rode past the telegraph office, a tiny room on the upper story of the wooden shops—the very end of the wire I had followed all these miles—past a crowd of Yarkandi pony men—burly, red-cheeked, felt-hatted fellows—past a red Lama or two, and out through a group of laughing peasant women with the great conical baskets laden with market produce upon their backs. Then on again among a cluster of mixed peoples, merchants in the long black coats and high black leather boots of Central Asia, pigtailed men in Chinese caps, through a winding alley, and so came out upon the fresh green of the tree-shaded bungalows of the tiny European quarter, where live the Moravian missionaries, and during the summer months the British Joint Commissioner.

Five minutes later I pulled up at the verandah of the imposing rest house, such a house as I had not seen since Kangan at the mouth of the Sind valley, and slipping gladly off my pony

staked my claim in one of the six rooms of the rest house which was to be my home for the best part of the coming week.

The thermos flask still contained a small cupful of tepid tea, which was grateful, as was also one of Aziza's "flitters" as he always calls them in his endeavour to anglicize his culinary efforts. Then came the ponies, which we off-loaded with a feeling of gratitude, and no sooner had I paid off the pony men and Ghani had laid out my bedding and unpacked some clean clothes, while Aziza had boiled some water for fresh tea, than the whole party vanished into the bazaar, for here were there not shops again —shops even more imposing than those of Kargil?

I washed and then got into my joy rags, that are saved for such great occasions as this, my best pair of chaplis and a pair of stockings that still had feet—for the road was hard on stockings, and later I was reduced to wearing a pair of old socks topped by the leg part of the stockings which had begun the march, to hide the gap between the top of the socks and my sun-blackened knees.

I had a still unpatched pair of puttoo shorts, and a clean white tennis shirt, with a gay-coloured regimental tie, also an old and beloved

coat, the worn-out sleeves of which were patched and bound with leather, and I had a soft hat that matched it. Vixen's teeth had spared that hat so far, though she ate most of the rim before I reached Srinagar again, and as I re-entered the city of the waters my first mission was to buy a hat, since the rimless, ragged debris that I marched back in, though it protected my head from the sun, was hardly good enough for society. But these things as yet belonged to the future. In Leh, as I have said, I still possessed a complete hat and complete stockings.

So feeling very fine and gaudy I sallied forth in the cool evening to explore the bazaar and see what new friends Fate had kept for me, for that perhaps is one of the great attractions of the road, the wonder whom you are going to meet at each new stage.

My first port of call was the bungalow of the Joint Commissioner, which adjoins the compound of the rest house, a hospitable-looking English house in spacious grounds. I found, however, that he was out on tour, but was expected back in a couple of days. Passing through the rest house compound I noticed a little camp, and from the dispositions in the big Swiss cottage tent which formed the centre

of it, I concluded that it must be the camp of one of the rare couples one sometimes meets in the wilder places. The two little camp beds, one each side of the tent—the camp table and two chairs in the little verandah at the front end, the tiny extemporised dressing-table with evidences of femininity—all spoke to the presence of a woman, one of those who take the road with their men.

Leaving the rest house I made my way through the winding little road past the pleasant houses of the missionaries, very home-like with their kitchen gardens and fruit trees, their bright flower plots, and once, seen through an open window, a kitchen dresser with bright utensils, for the Leh bungalows are far less Eastern than the Indian ones, and all indoor work is done by women servants, which must be a joy to the white woman.

Pottering about the bazaar I ran into the owners of the camp I had remarked near the rest house, an I.M.S. doctor and his wife spending three months' leave from the frontier in globe-trotting about Ladakh. Like me, they were clearly clothed for the occasion, for he had a coat, although no tie at the moment, and his wife wore a skirt instead of the more usual breeches and puttees of the road. The Merri-

mans, as I will call them, because it wasn't their name, were folk after my own heart, filled with the love of the road, and the joy of strange, wild places, the woman with the proper woman's gift of making a home for a man out of a tent and a handful of camp furniture.

Returning to their camp for a cigarette and a drink, we found Mrs. Heber, the wife of the doctor of the mission, who was out on tour with the Commissioner—herself a doctor also. She had come over to arrange a consultation with Major Merriman for one of her patients, the wife of a Yarkandi merchant whom she had at last got to consent to being examined by a man, thanks to Mrs. Heber's persuasive tongue, and Merriman's high qualifications, which Mrs. Heber had impressed upon her patient.

While they were talking shop, Mrs. Merriman and I made plans for visits of exploration to Leh and the monasteries around, and I proposed to her that she and her husband should come with me to the Khardong pass, a proposal joyously closed with. A pass nearer 18,000 than 17,000 feet is worth climbing even in Ladakh, where passes run higher than in most other parts of the world. Moreover, from it, if the gods were good, we should see the Karakorum mountains, which are the backbone of Central Asia, and

we were all three of the kind to whom the sight of distant high snows is a call that seems to penetrate right into one's very soul.

As dusk fell we broke up and I returned to my room intent on an early dinner and an early and long bed, with the pleasant prospect of a Europe morning and breakfast somewhere about half-past eight instead of the more usual hour of five-thirty or six, as it had been for some time.

And after dinner I lay in bed for a space before I blew out my candle, reading the little books of poetry that always take the road with me, anthologies full of the haunting longing of the poet for the something further on. I suppose every true poet has the wanderlust deep in his heart, no matter of what he sings.

Then I pushed Vagrant off my lower chest, which is where he always tries to crawl—half asleep—to his more proper place over my feet, and blowing out the candle-lamp, sought sleep with great envy in my heart of men like Merriman, and others I know, for whom the charms of the road are doubled, and more than doubled, by the joy of the best companionship in the world as they tread it.

CHAPTER XII

A GLIMPSE OF THE LEH MONASTERIES

DESPITE all my good resolutions to have a real Europe morning, the habit of the road is not broken in a day, and I awoke in the morning at 5 o'clock as usual. The puppies effectually prevented me from getting to sleep again, even had I been so inclined, so that eventually at 7 o'clock I gave up the effort, and going out on to the verandah, shouted to Ghani to bring me some tea.

Followed breakfast and the ceremony of hair-cutting. Wherever one arrives in the East, always the first person to greet one seems to be the itinerant barber, a leather wallet containing the implements of his trade girt to his waist, and in his hand a tin contraption that looks for all the world like a gigantic pepper castor, but is in reality a jug for hot water, with sometimes a little receptacle for glowing charcoal below. In the old days of the pagoda tree, it was his business to shave the white man—a horrid habit picked up from the Oriental, who never shaves himself. Thanks, however, to the

force of military custom, this habit is now practically dead as far as the white man is concerned, doubtless much to the barber's annoyance, since he is reduced to mere hair-cutting, which is naturally of far less frequent occurrence.

He talked, of course—an unceasing flow of speech seems the caste mark of barbers all the world over, and I have yet failed to find any recipe for stopping them. I suppose an Oriental potentate would remove their tongues, but then, on the other hand, the Orient likes conversation with all and sundry, and the barber's second function in the East, quite as important as his one of removing superfluous hair, is that of retailing, or inventing, news. This is probably easy, since he never has a shop. Ordinary folk have their shave or hair-cut at the street corners or on railway platforms, while the more well-to-do Indian and the sahib send for the barber to function on their verandahs.

Having dismissed the barber, I turned my attention to overhauling the store yakhdans, so that Ghani and Aziza could make any necessary replacements in the Leh bazaar. That over, and time drawing on, I went across to the Merrimans' camp, where I found Mrs. Merriman and two ponies, for the doctor himself had gone

MRS. MERRIMAN WITH LADAKHI WOMEN IN LEH BAZAAR (p. 183)

 "SHE WAS A FRIENDLY-LOOKING LADY" (p. 196)

off for the consultation with Mrs. Heber on the Yarkandi lady, and was to meet us in the bazaar.

We walked through the bazaar, therefore, to the foot of the great hill whereon stands the palace, and looked around for our guide, a Ladakhi employé in the tiny post-office who boasted a fair smattering of Hindustani. He also was late, so we employed our time in trying to induce the street-corner groups to be photographed, in which we had some little difficulty with the women, until Mrs. Merriman formed a group of the more picturesque ones round herself, and thereafter they lost their fear of the camera or their reluctance to be photographed. Not being Musalmans there was no reason why they should object.

Of course, the strictest kind of Musalman has prejudices against picture-making of any sort, since he adheres very strictly to the letter of the old Jewish commandment anent the making of graven images, and photos used to be included in the category, although this is fast being lost sight of, and Indian photographers flourish, more especially perhaps in the north. But I have always found them Hindus, the Muhammadan evidently hedging in the matter by paying someone else to make the "graven

image." But he still holds firmly to the original belief as regards his religious buildings, tombs, and architecture generally. All ornamental designs are tracery of leaf and flower and line, never of animals or human beings.

The Buddhist, on the other hand, like the Hindu, rejoices in representations of all forms of life, both real and imagined, and when, having collected our guide, a voluble and unwashed pigtailed Thibetan, the three of us mounted the ponies and, climbing the steep hillside past a regular warren of little houses, came to a small red monastery, we found images unending.

A red Lama, very frowsy and dirty, not at all a good example of his class, and smelling somewhat of *chang*, which is the Ladakhi substitute for whiskey, was produced to show us round. Still, he showed us the sights, which was all we wanted, opening the doors with the massive keys that hung at his girdle.

We went up to the upper story, and passing through wide doors into a dim chamber, found ourselves gazing into the impassive golden features of an immense Buddha, Maitreya, the Buddha to come, for like most religions, Buddhism has another " coming " to look forward to. In some parts the images of Maitreya are shown seated in Western fashion, that is, with the feet

hanging down instead of tucked under the body in the manner of the East, which is rather interesting, since these images date from days long previous to any intercourse with the West.

In this case we could not see the legs of the gigantic seated figure, not less than fifteen feet high from the ground-level of the room below us, which being, however, in dense shadow gave no view as we craned over the railing. The only things one could make out were smaller flanking figures at each side.

From there we passed to another, larger, chapel adorned on every side with stencilled and painted Buddhas and Boddhisats or "nearly Buddhas," and littered with great rolls of scriptures, or to be more correct, bundles of MS., for the Thibetans write or print with wooden blocks on long strips of paper which are packed in bales with outer covers of wood. It was a biggish library and I wondered if the Lamas had much idea of what it all contained. By the look of the bundles they were not handled over-frequently.

At one end of the room was an altar surmounted by small figures of Buddha, some of stone and some of metal, and before this, on little tables, the usual heaps of rice, bowls of water, vases of flowers, and minor offerings. There were little oil lamps burning also, but

one of them was of different type, being composed of a huge metal bowl supposed to contain a year's supply of oil, in which floated a small wick. Above the wick was suspended a rough sheet-metal drum containing smoke-blackened rolls of paper, upon which were inscribed hundreds of thousands of repetitions of the text, *Om mane padme hum.* The hot air from the wick impinging against the vanes of the drum kept it spinning merrily, and thus the prayer mounted heavenward hour after hour, night and day, with the minimum of labour, merely a yearly filling of oil, and periodical attention to the coarse cotton wick. Some day, when electricity and the dynamo are introduced into Thibet, salvation will become even cheaper than it is at present. An electro-motor prayer-wheel at 3,000 revolutions per minute would put heaven within the reach of all.

The spacious room was somehow rather Chinese, perhaps partly owing to the lacquered woodwork of heavy red, perhaps also from its absence of any arches, for the arch is unknown in Ladakh and everything is made with cross-beams, domes being raised where necessary by series of cornerwise beams closing in more and more, until the apex can be covered by a single flat piece of wood or stone.

It was comparatively fresh and airy, too, but this I think was explained by the big locked doors behind the altar, leading to a hall to which we were not admitted; in fact we were rather hurriedly chased away. But the doors fitted badly and through the chinks we could make out great bas-reliefs of hideous black and white demon figures, the real holy of holies where takes place the true worship of Ladakh, the Bon devil worship that is but faintly covered with the veneer of Buddhism.

Having bestowed a small piece of silver upon the Lama, we went further up the hill and were brought to a tiny chapel which was simply crowded with little images of Buddha, and whose walls were adorned with rather nice fresco paintings of the regents of the quarters of the world—demigods, as it were.

You meet them everywhere, and always in the same guise. There is a very warlike-looking gentleman with dark blue face, burly, armoured, and bearing a sword. This is the Regent of the South. The Regent of the North is fair in colour and determined-looking. He of the West is red in tint, while the Regent of the East is a most languid-looking yellow gentleman playing upon a lute and minus one ear. The story goes that he was so intent upon his music, that when

someone who didn't like him came and cut off his ear he didn't even notice it, but went on playing.

The colours and poses are really rather symbolical to my mind, the blue and warlike leader of the South where live the dark Dravidian races and the fierce negro tribes, the fair-skinned, resolute man of the North, the copper-coloured lord of the West, and the apathetic musician of the East.

In addition to the usual offerings of grain and flowers and bowls of water, here were quaint-shaped mounds of coloured butter, rancid in smell, with an odour that filled the whole of the little room. Laid among the offerings were small brass implements of worship, notably the dorje or thunderbolt—a little dumb-bell-shaped affair of brass, which the Lamas and nuns spin backwards and forwards in one hand as they intone their prayers. It is a sacred emblem of great power over demons, and the original one is supposed to have flown from India to Thibet, where to this day, if you are doubtful about the truth of the story, you may see it enshrined near Lhassa.

Ceremonial drinking cups, long spoons of brass and copper, little cups laid out upon folding lacquered tea-tables of Chinese type, dorje-handled

bells of brass, and everywhere faded marigold flowers.

I could have spent several hours there, but our guide was of little use since his knowledge of Hindustani—our only medium of speech—was small, and his knowledge of his own religion, like that of most Thibetans, extremely limited. Religion in Thibet is for the clergy and by no means for the laity. Very logical when you think it out, since it ensures a constant livelihood for the Lama and a minimum of worry for the laity, other than the incessant need of dipping into the quaint purses which hang at their girdles, with the odd-shaped keys, the flint and steel, and the long-stemmed, tiny-bowled pipes.

But in the afternoon we were more fortunate, for Mrs. Merriman had secured one of the Moravian missionaries to take us over the yellow-cap monastery of Tsankar, and thus we saw it under the best auspices, with as our guide a student of both the language and the religion, with a breadth of mind that could really render to us something of what the religion means.

That broad-mindedness and sweet reasonableness seemed to be common traits of the Moravians. Great earnestness entirely divorced from even the soupçon of fanaticism is to my mind just the mixture required for the missionary.

The only point that really upset them was the fact that certain visitors to Leh will speak of them as foreigners, which, since they are English to a man—and woman—must be most riling. Moreover, even their mission is not foreign, having been domiciled in England since somewhere about the middle fifteen hundreds.

After tea at the Merrimans' camp we set out for Tsankar, which lies about two miles from the rest house, and our missionary guide warned us to keep our sticks handy on approaching the monastery; a caution that was needed since the monastery dogs are bigger even than the usual Thibetan dogs, and inclined to ask no questions, but go straight at the stranger's throat—great bushy-coated beasts whose leader carried a head that would not have disgraced a black lion.

Our arrival synchronised with a procession, and we were greeted with sound of horn and trumpet, stringed instruments and drums, as towards the chapel doorway from a side building in the wide courtyard came a string of red-gowned, yellow-capped Lamas, some of whom, however, wore great helmet-shaped erections on their heads instead of the smaller, more usual, caps of daily wear. With them were many little novices, bare-headed as a rule, one

of whom carried upon his back an open-fronted shrine containing an image of Buddha, while another bore the sacred book from which they had been reading.

Upon the edge of the chapel to which they were returning stood two red-robed figures with the great cloth helmets, who blew unceasingly into long trumpets of brass, five or six feet long, with a great droning note.

After the Lamas had deposited the sacred books and the image, they put aside the horns and drums and greeted us with great friendliness, for they were on good terms with our cicerone, who professed a liking for the yellow-caps.

When the great Tsong Kapa, dismayed at the state of Buddhism in Thibet, set about reforming the church, the first error he discovered was that the Lamas wore coloured garments instead of the original saffron of Buddha's followers, the saffron that from time immemorial has been associated in India with the man who has cast aside the world and the flesh. Many other and far more gross evils also he discovered, but his reforms failed greatly, and the yellow cap is perhaps a symbol, since popular prejudice forced him to retain the red robe, changing only the colour of the cap. And so with his other reforms, they went just as far as popular

feeling would let them go and no more. Still he achieved something, perhaps, and certainly the yellow-cap monastery of Tsankar was a pleasing place, with a feeling of quiet worship and a complete absence of devilry. Here, it seemed, was some slight lingering of the spirit of the founder, seeking after the lost beauty and purity of Gautama's teachings, that have been overlaid and crushed by the original beliefs of a savage and superstitious people.

A pleasant-faced Lama with features rather like the more intellectual type of Gurkha escorted us round, showing us all there was to see, while two or three novices followed us, partly to assist the Lama with the opening of doors and the like, partly I think to feast their eyes on our weird and wonderful selves. Quite children they were, for they begin early, but even so they are entitled to the honorific address of *Meme* (Grandfather). Bright-faced little boys they were, and merry.

We did not see the abbot—the Skushog, as the Thibetan title is—for he was under tuition at the big monastery at Spitog. His present age (in this life, be it understood) is a mere seven years, and he is occupied relearning the necessary knowledge required on the earthly sphere, for, of course, he is a reincarnation of

the previous Skushog, who in turn was a reincarnation of all the still earlier ones, and so back to some original Boddhisat.

On the death of a Skushog, or rather shortly after it, a number of children born since his death are collected, and one of them is duly identified as his reincarnation and becomes Skushog in his place, his parents thereby achieving certain honour. But until he comes of age he has to undergo the ordinary cares of childhood and youth and the dull round of lessons.

We saw the photo of the last incumbent, a big man of fine presence and with a most ecclesiastical type of face, one full of power. Dressed in different guise one would have picked him out as a notable person among a gathering of cardinals at Rome.

In the entrance to the chapel was the usual picture of the wheel of life with its sixfold divisions showing the different spheres of gods and men and demons, animals, ghouls, and Titans. The six spheres surround a common centre in which are the conjunct pig, dove, and serpent, representing respectively ignorance, lust, and anger, the three faults that bind the soul to the curse of living, and whose eradication is necessary for the attainment of the desired nothingness.

In a circle outside, forming as it were a tyre to the wheel, was a series of little scenes depicting most attractively men's life from actual birth till death—birth, youth, love, war, old age and death being all pictured. The hells in the lowest of the six main divisions were distinctly lurid, with their merry demons sawing people asunder with very jagged saws, and, of course, the cold hells were really terrific. To a people living at an altitude of between ten and sixteen thousand feet a cold hell is something very easily visualised. Our own religion having sprung from a warm land, hell as signifying a place of torment naturally tends to the conception of overwhelming heat and thirst, the natural tortures of a desert-dwelling folk. But to those of the high mountains the tortures of cold, which can be so intense, are doubtless more convincing, for I don't suppose any Thibetan understands excess of heat.

The whole wheel is held by a gigantic blue-faced demon whose row of serrated upper teeth grins above the top of the circumference, as he grips it in teeth and talon-like hands.

From the hall of entry we passed into the outer chapel, with its little rows of stalls for the novices, the Skushog's chair, and to one side of it the novice master's place. Behind the

Skushog's throne is the altar proper, bearing a representation of Avalokita, the Buddha of Mercy, with eleven heads and a halo of arms. All about him, dimly seen in the dark-shadowed chapel by the flickering light of the oil-filled brass spoon with the coarse cotton wick carried by our Lama guide, were rows of little glass-fronted and sealed cupboards containing statuettes of Buddhas and Boddhisats, and several of the saintly Tsong Kapa.

It was very dark in that part of the chapel, but nowhere were there any signs of the demon worship of the red monasteries, only the quiet-faced Buddhas absorbed in contemplation, or the perhaps more attractive representations of the Buddhist conception of divine pity.

Leaving that, we came out into a well-lit hall, whose painted wood roof was carried on many carved wooden pillars, hung with silk streamers and banners, and upon the floor, sitting mats in place, for it was a day of festival. Here again frescoes of the regents of the quarters and more cupboards containing statues and images and little enclosed figures in ikon-like shrines, from the tiny ones that are worn as charms to those fifteen to eighteen inches square and six or eight inches deep, such as we had seen carried in procession.

Then up a narrow ladder to the upper story, where from a bright upper chamber we passed into a little shrine lit by latticed wood screens, wherein was a very gorgeous representation of Dukar, the goddess of help and plenty. At least that is what we were told, though there seemed some doubt as to whether it was not really Tara, the wife of Avalokita. She has a thousand arms and legs and a thousand eyes, but the artist had rendered these so that far from being repellent and inhuman they merely formed a sort of halo about the central figure, which was rather over life-size.

She was a friendly-looking lady with an engaging smile, and most extraordinarily alive in her vivid clothing of green and crimson, and with lips of the most vivid carmine, while halo and dress were splashed everywhere with gold. As a finishing touch some devotee had draped a rich shawl over her left hand that went well with the gay colours of her many-flounced skirt. I succeeded in getting her photo with the aid of a small novice and an upturned tea-table—an amazing fluke of a photo, since it was a five minutes' exposure in the dimmest of lights late in the evening. But I longed for a panchromatic plate to deal faithfully with all that wealth of colour.

At last, bidding the lady farewell, we climbed out on to the monastery roof and stayed there a while, looking out towards the great snows to southward, bluey-white over the warmer lilac shadows of the lower hills, all about us the quiet peace of the green fields of barley and the murmuring of the little irrigation channels. Then we chatted through our interpreter with the Lama, who had, like many of his kind, been to the holy of holies at Lhassa to complete his novitiate. The head of the Thibetan Buddhists, the Dalai Lama at Lhassa, who is to them what the Pope is to Catholics, is always a yellow-cap, and so the yellow-cap monks journey there whenever they can.

Then, as the shadows lengthened, we made our way downstairs again, or rather down the rough wooden steps, which were more like ladders, to the great courtyard, where the players of the stringed instruments tuned up in our honour. The Lamas confined themselves to the proper instruments of church music, the long trumpets and the drums, and the stringed instruments were played—as everywhere in the East—by people of low caste, disreputable folk of mean appearance, but jovial withal, as indeed all Thibetans seem to be.

The dogs evinced enmity after their fashion,

but the Lamas dealt with them, and they snarled their way into corners and let us pass unscathed, and so bidding good-bye to our hosts, we made our way back towards the rest house, whose great trees formed a thick clump of dark green against the darkening star-lit evening sky and the great, gaunt hills that rose far off on every side.

Then back to tents and dak bungalow in the dusk, with a confused memory of endless representations of Buddha and his disciples, of gilt and coloured images, of prayer wheels and prayer banners, of drums and long horns, of incense and dim painted chapels, of the scent of faded flowers and old silks. And underlying it all a great regret that shortness of leave would force me to the road again before many days, having seen not a thousandth part of the quaintly fascinating sights of this dreamy backwater of Little Thibet.

CHAPTER XIII

THE KHARDONG PASS

A DAY'S ride north of Leh lies the Khardong pass, which is the gateway from Ladakh on the road to Chinese Turkestan, perhaps the most important caravan trade route between India and Central Asia. It crosses the Ladakh range by a depression which is some 17,600 feet high, although unfortunately I had not a sufficiently good aneroid with me to get the accurate height. The instrument I had in Leh only registered to 10,000, and had been practically useless ever since Baltal, while my 20,000 aneroid was delayed on its way from England and never reached me till my return to Kashmir. My map gave the pass at the figure I have quoted, but the doctor in Leh, who had a reliable aneroid, put it some hundred or so feet less.

Anyway, the main point is that the Khardong pass is in the vicinity of 1,500 feet higher than the summit of Mont Blanc, and consequently quite a reasonable height to reach on their own legs for anybody other than a professional mountaineer of the kind that never seems to

think in terms of anything less than 20,000 feet.

Moreover, from it on a fine day you get a grand view of the snow-clad Karakorum mountains and a 24,000-foot massif some 50 miles away. To those who, like myself, feel the call of high snows, could any prospect be more attractive, especially when from a variety of causes one has been prevented from looking upon a spot to which one has felt drawn for many years? And to me somehow the Karakorum range and the hills about it have been a magnet whose attraction has never waned since I first heard of them years and years ago.

I fired the Merrimans with my enthusiasm in the matter of the Khardong—no difficult task, since they are of the same leanings as myself—and as a result the day following our visit to the Tsankar monastery saw the three of us on the road at a quarter past six. We were mounted on rather better ponies than usual, for which the assistance of the Commissioner's head clerk had procured us English saddles, or rather saddles of English pattern, a great boon in view of the fairly long ride, for we had 24 miles to cover with a rise of 6,000 feet.

To do the whole journey on foot was out of the question owing to the matter of time, for we

wanted to get back the same night, but I intended to take to my feet again as soon as we passed the 13,500 level, when things would certainly begin to slow up, for the horse—even the Thibetan pony—is not meant for high altitudes.

The first hour of our way lay through gently rising ground dotted with chortens, white splashes among the rich emerald of the barley fields, showing here and there occasional villages. Then we entered a long winding valley between bare rock hills, rising ever higher and higher as we followed the bank of a fast-flowing torrent, whose bed was heaped with tumbled rocks lichened a most curious orange colour.

We passed the leading men and ponies of a big caravan from Yarkand, who had crossed the pass the evening before, great big ponies with bells at their necks, carrying enormous bales of the rugs and numdahs and felts of Yarkand, Kashgar, and Khotan, and ridden by burly, fair-skinned men with curious felt leg wrappings and broad-brimmed felt hats, a quaint sight in the East, where one is accustomed to either the turban or the skull-cap.

I dismounted after passing them, and handing my pony to one of the men we had brought with us, went forward on foot, having as near as I could judge reached the desired level,

corresponding to the highest pass so far met on the road, the Photu La, which lay hidden miles and miles away behind me over the great hills on the further side of Leh.

I judged rightly in the matter of the ponies, for they were beginning to lag badly, and behind me on the winding path some way below I could see the Merrimans halting every few minutes to let their beasts get their panting breath again.

Another hour's steady plodding in the thinning air with my pace dropping all the time, until I was making no more than sixty to seventy paces to the minute, and we came out upon a wide plateau whereon were encamped a big gathering of Ladakhis with yaks and tzos, and the leading men of another caravan of Yarkandis.

We were all glad of a halt, while the ponies were off-saddled and their saddles transferred to two tzos and a yak. At least I think it was a yak, although I suppose an expert would be needed to define where the dividing line comes after much interbreeding. It was a rather big, upstanding animal with particularly fine horns and long hair, and I adopted it although I had no intention of riding it up, but considered it might be ridden down without loss of self-respect.

I judged the height of the plateau at something over 15,000 feet, but I rather think my

estimate was below the mark from what the Leh people said, and also from the time which it took us subsequently to reach the summit of the pass, for the going was distinctly bad, and yet we were at the top in a little under two hours, and at that altitude 1,000 feet to the hour is very reasonable going for laden animals.

The so-called road from the plateau lay up a moraine of great boulders, evidently brought down by the melting snows from the heights on either side during the spring months. But now in August on this the south side there was practically no snow to be seen, for in the arid Ladakh country the snow level lies pretty high in summer.

It was hard work, and I found that it took a modicum of will-power to keep going for stretches of twenty minutes at a time, picking one's way upward among the heaped boulders. The air was distinctly thin—not that that worries me as a rule, for I have but little breath at sea-level and find that I have no less at high altitudes, which is rather the reverse of most people's case. Only my legs got slower, and counting my paces—being of a methodical turn of mind—I found them falling to about fifty to the minute, with practically a breath to every two paces in the worst places.

Then suddenly and rather unexpectedly, for I had no idea we had got so high, I found myself on a narrow crest of deep snow not more than perhaps twenty feet wide, beyond which the snow fell steeply downward for several hundred feet in a long, shining bank of white. Up this a party of men were laboriously struggling to get three ponies, and on the level beyond them a dozen more beasts were being off-loaded, since no laden animal could hope to climb that slippery, frozen bank of what was really ice. To our right towered a higher ridge of rock and snow, and to our left along the crest a long, sloping field of unbroken snow, beyond which rose up steeper hills with long, creviced sides of rock barred with snow slides.

And out away in the blue distance lay the great snow peaks of the Karakorum that I had waited so long to see. Mrs. Merriman joined me as I stood there leaning on my khudstick, tired legs forgotten, drinking it all in and feeling that the long journey had been more than rewarded by that view before me.

The rest of the party caught us up, and we made our way across the snow to shelter under the lee of some big rocks where we could make a fire with the wood we had brought up. Hot tea would be welcome, and after that lunch might

be thought about. It was cold there despite the climb and the vivid sunshine, since the thin air seemed to hold but little heat for all that the glare off the snow was blinding.

Below us, at the foot of the steep snow descent, opened out a little valley gemmed with two tiny lakes of the true jade colour of glacier water. The Yarkandis with the three ponies had nearly reached the top, cutting steps here and there for the beasts' feet, and then one of the animals slipped and went sliding down again. A projection caught it, luckily, and the men slithered after it, hauled it to its feet again, and manhandled it up once more. But it slipped again twice before they brought it at last to the summit, its flanks heaving spasmodically as it stood there in the bloodstained snow, for its knees had been badly cut on the ice. It was rather a fine picture of endeavour, the three men and the pony all alike fighting for breath in the thin air as they rested on the flat snow at the top.

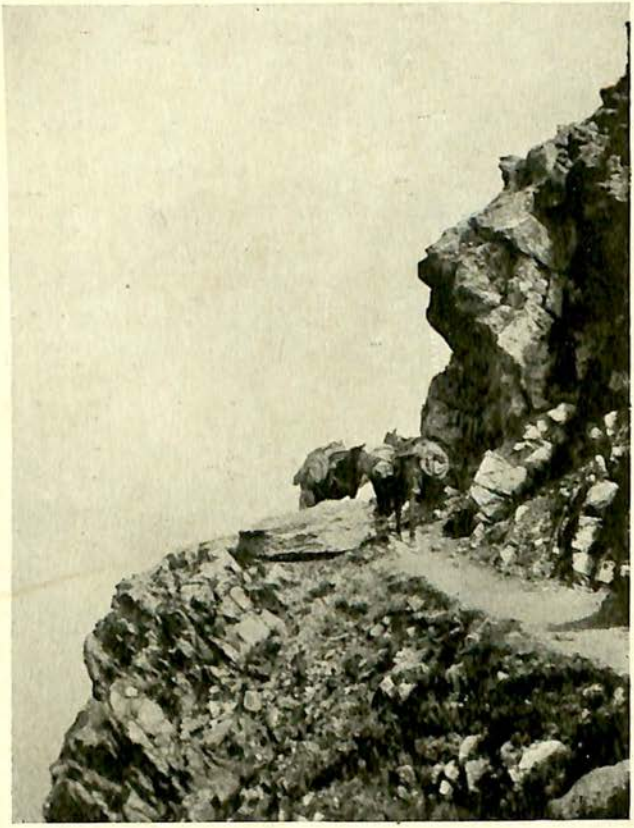
They had been working all the morning, and when we left in the afternoon the last of the ponies were just being dragged up, the loads being brought after them by the yaks hired for the occasion from the plateau we had passed lower down. The yaks and tzos, of course,

needed no help, they almost seemed to swim as they moved steadily upwards, never making a mistake, and unworried by the thin air for which they were made. I suppose they must have specially big lungs, their great chests look like it, and certainly they do not thrive well much below 10,000 feet.

It is funny how it is only the man and the dog that seem able to adapt themselves to different climates and altitudes and still thrive. All the other animals seem to have limited ranges. The yaks were in their element here, but down at the lower levels they would have been showing every sign of distress, while the ponies, which here could only just drag themselves along unladen, would have been tripping along the cliff roads under heavy burdens.

Those Yarkandis impressed us very favourably. Burly men, with very fair skins and often with little beards like those of the old-time British sailor fringing their chins. Cheerful souls, too, and friendly, albeit we could not converse with them. But they drank the remains of our tea, and ate the hard-boiled eggs and bread left over from our lunch with considerable relish, sitting beside us at the edge of a snow bank. One always feels drawn to men who make their living by facing hard work and hardship, and

LOOKING TOWARDS LEH FROM THE SUMMIT OF THE KHARDONG



"... A STIFFISH PASS WITH A PRECIPITOUS DROP ..." (p. 207)

the roads from Central Asia to India mean both in plenty. You realise this when your own comparatively lightly laden animals are being manhandled over a stiffish pass of fair height with little air to breathe and sometimes a precipitous drop on one side of the narrow ledge along which the struggling animals are being hauled and pushed by the breathless men, and where a false step by a slipping or frightened beast may send it and the men to destruction on the rocks far below.

Presently upon the sky-line behind us appeared one whom at first glance I took to be the head of the Yarkandi caravan. The new white felt hat, the long black choga and high leather boots seemed to speak the Merchant of Middle Asia. But the presence with him of a khaki-clad, turbaned Arghun raised doubts, and hailing him in Hindustani, I discovered that it was the brother of the Aksakal of Leh, who was on a visit to Khardong village, beyond the pass, a youthful, pleasant-spoken man with fine ponies and carrying a Yarkandi whip that my heart craved. I asked him where I could get its like, and he promised to find me one on his return, and actually two days later in Leh he sold me that very whip. A well-made Yarkandi whip seemed just the souvenir to bring back from the

Khardong in memory of the marches we had made, and the still harder ones we should have to make to get back to Kashmir in time.

At last it was time to think of returning, and we repacked the tiffin basket and rose to our feet, taking our last look at the great wide panorama of hills before us. There is always something sad about the turning-point of a road, a sense of something being cut short, of limitation, so much more to do and so very little achieved.

There before us lay spread out the hills which are the beginning of the true heart of Asia, and to me it was very bitter to have to turn my back on them and not to be able to go forward. I wanted to see my string of ponies sliding down that long snow incline in front, our faces set to the old historic highway that goes on and on, through the deserts of the Tarim and the Takla Makan, on and on through the Gobi until you come to the old, forgotten ruins of the Great Chinese Wall, traversing countries that have been the birthplace of the oldest of civilisations, civilisations that have been sand-buried these thousand years and more.

So I turned, and leaving half my dreams behind me wandering on into the great expanses of blue and snow-barred mountains that lay ahead, made my way back over the tumbled rocks to

the flat snow-field where the animals awaited us and the Merrimans were mounting. We took a photo of the wonderful sweep of snow-topped hills that lay behind us over the winding valley that led down to Leh, long line of snow and banked white cloud, against which clear and sharp stood out the little stone cairns that marked the pass, vivid sunlit stonework against the infinite distances. We took photos of the tzos and the yak, too, with ourselves on top as souvenirs of this day of days.

Then we headed our shambling beasts down the steep track that meandered over the moraine, at least we pretended to head them with the ropes attached to their wooden nose rings, but really they went their own way, swimming over the rocks with their little short legs that make the motion so comfortable. A pony over that ground would have been one long succession of heaves and jerks, whereas the yak's pace seemed more like riding a snake or a gigantic lizard as the great black beast wound its way along.

There were masses of wild flowers on the rock slope, as there always seem to be on the passes, no matter how bare and gaunt the hills around may be. Mauve was the prevailing colour here —mauve anemones, mauve Michaelmas daisies,

sprinkled with blue-and-white saxifrage, and little red coral plants everywhere, beside dozens more little rock flowerets and coloured plants for which none of us could even hazard a name. Lower down we came upon occasional forget-me-nots and once a blue gentian, the invariable flower of the Kashmir passes, which seems rare, however, in Ladakh.

We reached the plateau to find the Yarkandi pony caravan encamping for the night, and our own pony men whom we had left there ready to change the saddles back to our original mounts. A little later, and we were riding down the steep and narrowing valley, the Khardong pass receding behind us; we turned from time to time to look back upon its summit, until at last a turn in the road hid the crest from us.

Thereafter the road lacked incident, save that we realised how steep the climb had been, as three times we had to stop when one or other saddle slid forward over the pony's withers, and the rider came off hurriedly and unpreparedly.

And then, at last, we debouched into the more level ground above Leh, and made our way through the irrigated fields as the sun sank slowly westward, to hide behind the great hills upon which not so many hours before we had been looking down from the snows of the pass. Leh

received us into its winding alley-ways, in the evening light, as we rode at a footpace through the little groups of Ladakhis, odd Yarkandi pony men, and all the miscellaneous peoples that gather in such places where the trade of half a continent meets the incoming trade of another.

Tired, slightly headachey, but nevertheless altogether well content with our day, we rode slowly homeward, to where the trees of the rest house loomed dark against the pale evening sky, and the first stars were twinkling out above the formless shadows of the great mountains that form a barrier around that dream kingdom—Lamaland.

CHAPTER XIV

A REST IN LEH

THE three days following our expedition to the Khardong pass were spent in extreme laziness at Leh, just visiting the sights and enjoying the hospitality of the few Europeans who make up the white population of the place.

The first afternoon was marked by tea with one of the Moravian missionaries, to which, in company with the Merrimans, I was most hospitably invited. It was a pleasant feast and somehow struck one as intensely homelike at every point. Probably it was the house itself, for the houses at Leh are more on the European pattern than any I have ever met in the East, being far more house and far less bungalow. The indoor kitchen instead of the separate outhouses to which India has accustomed us, the kitchen dresser, the cheerful, loquacious female who, in glory of Thibetan finery, presided over the pots and pans and the larder, had perhaps much to do with the prevailing impression that instead of being near the heart of Asia, one had somehow been wafted on a

magic carpet back to a little country farmhouse in an old corner of England.

Leh life is primitive in many ways, a fact which we realised that day to the full, as we ate home-made bread and home-churned butter, home-made jam, and little luxuries from the kitchen garden, waited on the while by a voluble Thibetan clothed in our honour in a very imposing garment and a new peaked cap.

You do not buy bread in Leh, since there is no baker, nor do you even buy flour. At harvest time you buy a large quantity of grain, and set your household down to winnow it. Thereafter, having sent word to one of the little local water-mills that you have a consignment ready for grinding, the place is swept and garnished for your visit of inspection, and then, leaving a man of your own to ensure that no substitution of inferior material for your carefully cleansed grain takes place, you deliver over your sacks.

In due course, when it has been ground, word is sent, and you return to weigh the resultant heaps, when the flour is borne back to your house, after which once or twice weekly the Thibetan kitchen lady will bake your bread.

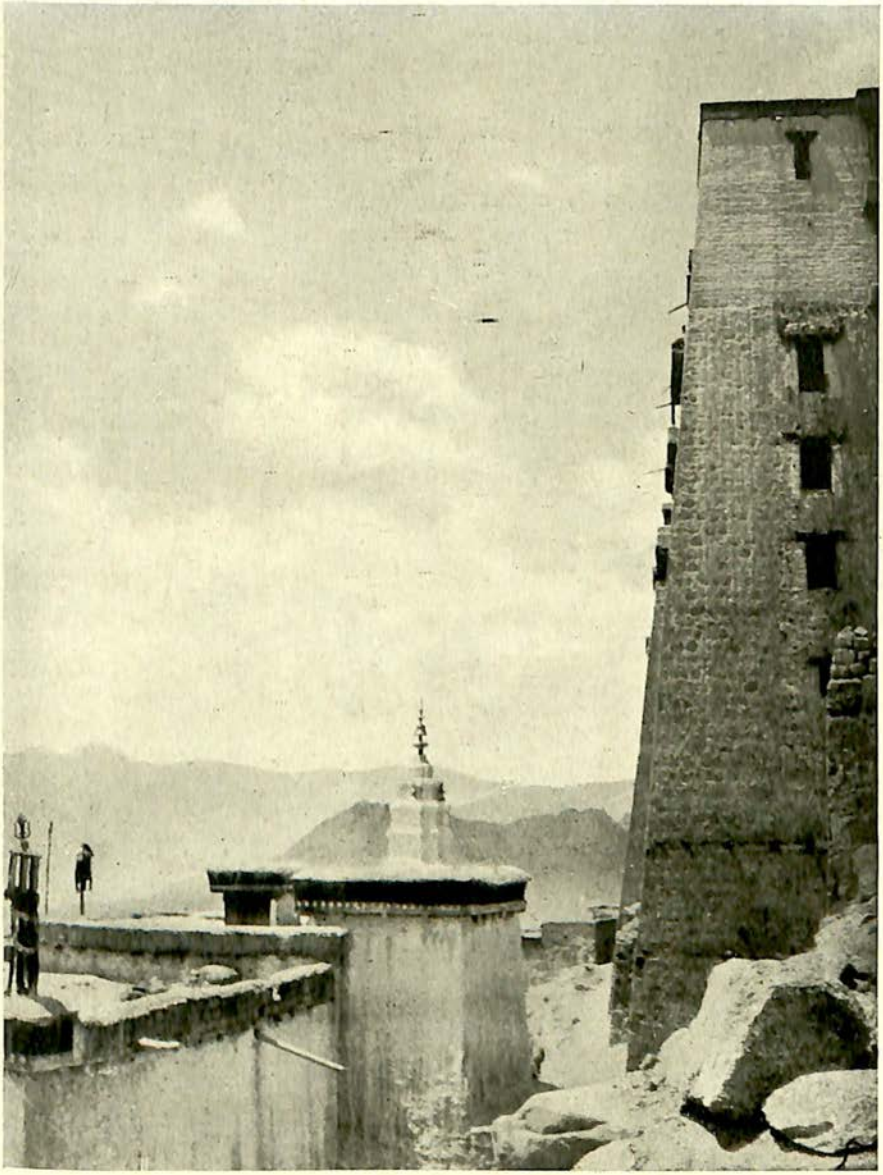
In like fashion you do not usually buy meat, you buy sheep instead, which are slaughtered, skinned, and dressed more or less on the premises.

In the warm weather you probably purchase an animal in share with two or three of your neighbours, but in winter you need not worry since all you have to do is to hang what joints are not required at the moment in an outhouse, whence they can be brought in as and when required. The winter temperatures of Leh render an ice house superfluous, and the game you shoot in October comes in handy, say, in March or April, provided only that you hang it in a shady corner.

Cloth also you buy but rarely, the more usual process being to purchase wool, which you have spun and woven into the required type of material. Most Thibetans seem to spend such time as their hands are free from prayer wheels in spinning yarn, walking along with quaint, spiked pieces of wood swinging at the end of a hank of yarn, which they spin steadily as they go.

Outside the villages you can see the rough cloth being woven on the long frames of string and sticks which they erect. Owing to the constructional difficulties of these frames, and for greater ease in weaving, the width of the cloth is usually very narrow and many lengths have to be sewn together subsequently.

And so with nearly everything one uses, the



A CORNER OF LEH PALACE

first step is the purchase of the raw material. Even world wars could have but little effect on such a life, where almost everything is produced locally.

But where many of us would come to grief is in lack of forethought, accustomed as we are to being able to buy everything we want at a moment's notice at the shop round the corner. The careless housewife in Leh who lets her stock of tea run low will have to wait two months or more before she can replace from India, and if it happen in the winter, stands every chance of not getting it for six months, if, as happened last year, a consignment gets lost in the snow of the passes. Consider the tragedy of the wife who neglects to restock her household with tobacco three months before it is likely to be required!

After tea we went for a walk to the little village of Champspa, behind Leh, where lives the Wazir of the King of Ladakh, who is as prosperous as his master is poverty-stricken. His village, moreover, is reputed holy, which may account for the numerous prayer banners we saw.

I mentioned the *mānĕ* wall as being a breastwŏrk against demon aggression. The Thibetan has nothing to learn in the art of "consolida-

tion," as we used to call it during the war. Nothing would induce him to trust merely to his front-line trenches—the *mānė* walls. Behind these lies an intricate system of prayer banners and prayer wheels, of red-painted goats' horns, and little images in wall niches, red-daubed stones and the like, while always there are the sacred trees. Trees are scarce in Ladakh, which perhaps accounts for their reputed demon-scaring propensities, since the trees are not found on the high mountains, which are the main resorts of demons, and so may be considered to be of their nature antagonistic to devils.

Should all these outer defences fail, the Thibetan has still the personal weapons, the hand prayer wheel, and the rosary of 108 beads hung at his girdle. The odd 8 beads are a little epitome of his anxiety to be safe, since the rosary should give him 100 *Om Manes*, and to be quite sure of the number he adds 8 more. The little brass prayer wheel is spun on a stick by means of a small weight on a short length of cord, so that with one hand a man can successfully keep a prayer screen going, the while he spins with the other.

Champspa was well protected, too, by a water-turned prayer wheel which runs night and day —save only when the little channel freezes in

winter—with no attention at all, so that the good folk may sleep undisturbed even if the wind drops and the fluttering prayer banners droop still and motionless from their little masts.

Little chortens everywhere, and a very delightful example of the triple type which Mrs. Merriman insisted on describing as "Punch and Judy shows," an open-fronted shrine containing three gaudily painted little chortens, with the back wall of the shrine adorned with paintings of various saintly beings.

And so in the half-light we retraced our steps towards the rest house through the barley fields, clambering up and down the stone retaining walls, and scrambling across the water channels, the big poplars ghostly in the dusk all about us, until in the end we came to the tiny cemetery. Here lie such Europeans as end their days in Leh, and sometimes in the wilder country beyond, the last resting place of the wanderers, who have gone forth bravely on the longest journey of all, the last pass of the long mountain road of life.

The other day at church we had a sermon about death and the way that people are supposed to picture it, the sedate death-bed with the family in attendance and everything well ordered. I wonder if people really do think

about death like that? To me comes no such picture, only a thought of the rocky hills, of the far horizons of infinite blue, and if I am lucky, the crack of rifles and the movement about me of armed men. Such seems to me the best of deaths, the clean finish at the end of toil, the end that Rupert Brooke calls up in his sonnets:

"Oh! we, who have known shame, we have found release there,
Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there,
But only agony, and that has ending;
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death."

Perhaps such deaths are rewards to some of us for good work, for long courage in facing life, for doing one's best against odds; anyhow I like to think that that is so, and since we do not know about such things, we must come back always to our own ideas, our own feelings.

The setting of Leh cemetery pleased me, for it lay there in sight of the great hills, and somehow I always feel that a cemetery would be no resting place unless it looked out on hills. Strictly logically, it doesn't matter in the least where one is buried, but there is always sentiment in such things, and my sentiment runs to the matter of hills.

And then, making our way to the rest house in the full dusk, we stumbled over an animal

that scuttled away and buried itself in a hole in the ground—a shaggy thing that looked like a bear cub. But when we had extricated it and brought it into the circle of light of the camp lanterns which our servants brought to meet us, it proved to be a starving, sick Thibetan puppy of the big shaggy breed, evidently abandoned by its mother—a pitiable object whose skin clung to its bones. We spent two fruitless days trying to save it, but it was too far gone, and so finally we put an end to its sufferings.

The Oriental everywhere is utterly callous with regard to the sufferings of animals, and even those few who do not actively ill-use their beasts in the endeavour to get the maximum of work out of them at the minimum of cost, will never take the trouble to put an animal out of its misery by a kindly bullet.

And yet, in complete opposition to our ideas, the wild tribesmen consider it an act of mercy to shoot a badly wounded man, whereas they would never do such an act for a disabled animal, nor have I ever met an Indian who would do such a thing. The Hindu may possibly be actuated by the teaching of his faith that the souls of men and beasts are interchangeable, being the same souls at different stages of their growth. But the Musalman has no such

belief, and with him it must be sheer callousness.

The next day was marked by a gathering at the doctor's, followed by a visit to the old palace, a great, six-storied rabbit-warren of tiny rooms reached by ladder-like stairs, which towers on the Namgayal hill above Leh. It was bare and empty and poor, the sole relieving feature being here and there roughly carved and painted door lintels, and in one place a balcony with fretted wood screens from which royalty might look out upon the ceremonial dances in the courtyard below. Perhaps in the days when the old Ladakhi kings held sway it was more gorgeous, but now that the King is a mere shadow under the rule of Kashmir, *Ichabod* is written over his dwelling, which indeed only remains erect thanks to a liberal grant from the Kashmir durbar to save an historic relic.

But from the roof the view was superb, the whole flat-roofed town of Leh below one, brown houses in a setting of vivid green fields among groves of willows and poplars. Beyond that stretched the long sweep of stone-scattered, sandy plain, which drops a shelving 500 feet to the Indus by Spitok's hill-perched monastery. Then the ground rises again on the further bank of the river to wall after wall of bare, savage

hills, culminating in snow-topped crests with the final white summit of Mount Sacrifice's 20,000 feet stabbing the cloudless sky.

Just the same wonderful hills which lie everywhere about the Indus all the way up from Sind, right along the Indian frontier and so up here in Little Thibet—hills of naked rock and stone that minute by minute, hour by hour, and day after day, are perpetually changing in colour—gold of dawn; shimmering blue haze of midday; mauve and violet and indigo under the rose and maroon of snow at sunset—wild hills with a fascination all their own for those to whom they call, for such of us as for some hidden reason love them at first sight and for ever after. The hills of Kashmir, clothed in forests of pine and fir and starred with all the grace of fern and wild flower, are beautiful with all the beauty of gardens, but the barren hills of "the other side" are to me far finer, for they speak always of the "hard, brave things" of the pilgrim road, and quiet my soul as nothing else can do.

The palace contained a little temple which we visited, but I regret to say the red Lama in charge was suffering from overmuch indulgence in *chang* and was maudlin drunk. His answers to our questions were very much beside the mark and we gleaned but little information.

But the view from the flat roof had more than repaid the climb up the hill, and up the rickety ladders of stairs, and possibly some charm fell upon us from the hills and the sunset, or it may perchance have been the Assistant Resident's excellent port. But when we dined that night at his hospitable house—a party of four, our host, the doctor and his wife, and myself—the strings of our tongues were loosened. Buddhist customs led to religions of other lands, and religions led on to religious beliefs, until in the end each spoke of his own beliefs, of his or her thoughts of life, and of the scheme of things the convictions that each had hammered out through the hard and the soft years—a conversation that could never be premeditated—one of those precious hours of interchange of thought that happen only spontaneously and all too rarely, and that sent us home thoughtfully silent in the starlit glory of the night.

The day following our visit to the palace was the day marked for my setting out back towards Kashmir once more, but as a result of information picked up that evening, I decided to cancel my proposed early morning start for Nyemu and in lieu to leave late in the afternoon for Spitok, a mere six miles' march, which is the usual way of leaving Leh, just a little march

out of the town. The difficulty in the East is always the getting under way—the truth of the French adage, *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte*, is nowhere more apparent than in the Orient. Once your men have been torn from the fleshpots all is well, and their sole anxiety is to get on with the marches to a new lot of fleshpots. And so often and often you will find that the normal first stage of a journey—stages which have grown habitual from hundreds and hundreds of years of travellers, is little more than a bare half-march.

I awoke Habib on my return from the Assistant Resident's and broke the news to him, and it did not appear to render him at all sorrowful, although he had secured the ponies overnight to ensure a dawn start. It would mean an extra double march on our way back, but what was one more or less when we had so many before us, over 180 miles to cover in eight days, and high passes to be crossed.

As a result of the change of plan I enjoyed a real Europe morning in bed, for the habit of the road had grown slightly less strong, and I slept late. Thereafter I bargained with a man for a silver-lined Ladakhi drinking bowl which pleased me, and still later secured my very coveted whip of Yarkand. The rest of the morning was

spent visiting various acquaintances, notably a trio who greatly interested me, wanderers like myself, but in whose wanderings was a deeper purpose, since they seemed to be seeking knowledge in the matter of faiths and were full of Buddhist lore, and spoke of astral bodies, and reincarnations, and other such matters wherein I refuse to believe but about which I always like hearing.

Lunch over and my string of ponies laden and despatched towards Spitok, I went across to the doctor's hospitable establishment for an early tea. A restful and altogether charming little house in a carefully tended garden, flowers and fruit and vegetables; attractive pictures on the walls of the low-windowed rooms and attractive books upon the shelves. Many of those books spoke of other wanderers, little souvenirs of those who had passed through Leh, while an autograph album to which I also was asked to contribute was packed with interesting names. As the doctor and his wife said, everyone who comes to Leh is either nice or queer—more often the former—but never uninteresting. This is easy to understand, for they are mostly explorers and scientists, artists, writers, or officials accustomed to administering the wilder corners of the earth, and such a gathering cannot

lack interest, whatever other faults it may possess.

We had a pleasing country farmhouse tea of home-made dishes, and I made a thorough glutton of myself over a huge bowl of junket, wherein I was aided and abetted by the daughter of the house, aged eightish, a young woman who had ridden her 240 miles from Srinagar over the passes on a pony some three years before.

We talked, of course, talked without stopping; in fact, I think I talked with my mouth full half the time in my anxiety to lose nothing of the junket and the other dishes, and at the same time miss nothing of the interesting conversation, and it was with great regret that late in the afternoon I had to tear myself away. It rained that afternoon, a rare phenomenon in that rainless country, and I set out on foot swathed in my mackintosh, Sidika leading our spare pony behind me, hung about with cauliflowers and beetroots, and such-like treasures pressed upon me as farewell gifts by my hosts, welcome indeed to break the monotony of the onions and potatoes which our ration sacks contained.

We made our way into the wide bazaar of Leh in the drifting rain, out through the great

gate into which I had ridden so few days before; and set our feet to the road once more under a cloud-veiled sky.

Presently the large cauliflower slipped off the peak of the saddle, and scared the pony so that it shied and broke away from Sidika's grasp to career off into the wide waste of stony plain that lies between Leh and Spitok. We pursued it, Sidika plodding along under his load, which presently he cast off by a heap of easily marked rocks.

The pony headed eastward, somewhere towards Simla seemed to be his intention, and we pursued the more vigorously, for bound to the saddle were several valued possessions, among them my only sun helmet and a pair of field glasses. Hope grew faint as we puffed along, the pony keeping tantalisingly out of reach, when at last an angel descended to our help. He was, of course, disguised in Thibetan clothes, with a turnip-like face, and he had tucked his halo in underneath a peaked astrakhan-edged cap, indescribably greasy. But he spread wide the skirts of his flowing garments, holding them up basin-wise and making endearing noises, until at last the pony was hypnotised into believing that they really did contain grain and ventured sufficiently near to let one of us seize

the long halter which always forms part of the harness, and which by great good fortune happened to have come undone. Normally it is looped up round the neck.

We rewarded the angel with a coin and left him looking foolishly at us as we pursued our way back in the direction of Spitok with a very firm grasp upon the halter.

The rain had ceased now, and the mountains ahead were all of the most wonderful deep indigo under the heavy storm-clouds and white wisps of mist, while behind us Leh looked wildly beautiful in its setting of gaunt hills, now all wreathed and softened by low banks of white clouds.

Then, as the dusk fell, we made our way into the garden of the little rest house of Spitok, where my kit was laid out in the tiny room, and two little white pups fawned upon me, while Dog Bill greeted me in more subdued, but none the less sincere fashion. And then the road claimed us once more—the long succession of days of marching, the midday halts for food, the evening camps or rest houses with the blue smoke of wood fires, and all the wonderful glory of wild hills at sunset.

CHAPTER XV

THE LONG ROAD BACK TO ARCADIA

My journey back from Spitok to the Sind valley in Kashmir is a memory of unceasing double marches, eight days of really hard going—hard, that is, for a person like myself, who spends most of the year pushing a pen in an office chair. One hundred and eighty-four miles we covered in those eight days, over three passes, and personally I covered all but four of them on foot; 180 miles of fair heel and toe.

Not being a fast walker at the best it generally took me all day, from shortly after daybreak to close on sunset, to get through the day's march, and there was little time, and I'm afraid less energy, left to explore further such places as I had passed on the way up. I altered some of the stages, however, and introduced an element of variety into my march, spending the first night at Saspula and the second at Khalatse, both of which places had been passed during the day on my outward journey, while after Bod Kharbu we picked up our two larger tents again, and thereafter forswore rest houses,

camping wherever fuel and water could be found at such time as the sun dipped near the hills of an evening.

On the first morning at Spitok I awoke to a cloud-dappled sky of grey, and as the rain of overnight had packed the sand somewhat, going was better than it had been the week before when we had made our way across the plain from the Phayang Dokpo among the biting flies to get our first glimpse of Leh.

On arrival at Nyemu, which Sidika and I made more or less without a halt, we secured fresh ponies, and then sat out in the rest-house garden to eat our midday meal and await the arrival of the rest of our party and the baggage. The day had cleared now and it was pleasant to sit in the shade of the cotton poplars on the deck chair produced by the chokidar in my honour, while Dog Bill helped me finish my lunch and subsequently slept at my feet while I dozed in the sun-dappled shadows.

It was close on midday before we had the kit loaded on the new ponies and set out again in very glaring sunshine for our march to Saspula. On leaving Nyemu we ran into a most picturesque trio, a Thibetan lady riding a pony and accompanied by a red Lama and small *chummo* or nun, a fat and cheerful but rather sexless-looking

little object with shaven head and tight-fitting cap.

I delayed to photograph them, to which they evinced no objection, rather the contrary, but as a result my transport got well ahead and I never caught it up again until after Basgu, for the day had warmed and the rain had not apparently reached here, so that the sand was heavy and wearisome.

Basgu of the goblin towers was as picturesque as ever, and the fruit in the orchards riper, so we stopped to get our fill of apricots and apples, while Dog Bill lay in a water channel absorbing moisture after his fashion. I turned my back on Basgu with regret, as we made our way up the steep little pass that separates it from the depression wherein lie the fields of Saspula, a long expanse of irrigated fields of emerald green under great hills that were now speckled with white from the night's snowfall.

It was the second little pass that day—not passes in the real sense of the word, merely stiff pulls uphill of an hour or more each, but quite enough to tire one somewhat. When at last Basgu had vanished behind us, and reaching the divide we looked down the narrow gorge leading towards Saspula, I owned myself beaten and sat down shamelessly for half an hour's halt

"A PICTURESQUE TRIO" (p. 229)

SNOW BRIDGES

OUR CAMP AT SONAMARG

with only one little saving sop to my pride, viz. that Aziza the stalwart was for once doing likewise. Perhaps the fleshpots of Leh were responsible for this his only sign of weakness on all our marches. At those altitudes even a slight dose of indigestion takes the heart out of one somewhat, and the Kashmiri, who, like all Orientals, eat less frequently but more fillingly than we do, suffers considerably from that complaint.

At last, feeling that we had better get forward again, I picked myself up and we slid on down the long, narrow, winding gorge of conglomerate and clay which in the end debouches on to the Saspula fields, after cutting at right angles into another valley down which sweeps the stream which is the life-blood of the long series of rich fields that make of Saspula a gem in a setting of arid brown hills.

We passed on among the waving green barley between the rippling water channels, and so in the end came to the rest house, less attractive than most, built as it is above the serai and surrounded by a closed courtyard in the best mediæval fashion. It was pleasant to fling oneself into a long chair for a while after twenty-four miles of the road since breakfast. Truth to say I was weary that evening, the first hard

march after five days of slothful ease and comfort, and beyond writing up my diary, did little else of note, though, of course, I had to take *yeh log* for their evening run, to make up to them for having been cooped up in their basket the whole day.

It was rather a gloomy evening, somehow, sitting there by candle light in the upper story above the serai where the men and ponies were camped for the night with their smoky wood fires, and I sought consolation in my bed books of verse for a space, ere I blew out the candle and settled down, hoping that the dawn would find me somewhat brighter and fresher for the road. Then the sleep of the wayfarer descended upon me, so that the next thing I knew was Ghani with a cup of tea and the first light streaming in through the windows, with *yeh log* making suggestive noises in their basket, which lay at the foot of my bed.

The night's rest had done its work, and I awoke feeling the world to be a better place than it had seemed the evening before, and stepped forth among the Saspula fields with a very much brisker step than on the previous evening. We passed out under the gaudy chorten gate which marks the entrance to Saspula, and took the narrow track which snakes

its way along the bank of the Indus for close on eleven miles, a rather fascinating path for all its barrenness.

It was very deserted that day, and save only one tiny group of wayfarers, halted in the lee of a shady rock, we saw no one until we reached Nurla of pleasant memories. The mulberries were now ripe, and when Sidika and I reached the rest house, my first care was to send him forth with my helmet to gather me a hatful, while I had a *hors-d'œuvre* of the luscious fruit gathered with my own hands.

One is always being cautioned against eating uncooked fruit in the East, for fear of divers dreadful ailments of the lower chest, and the only way in which one can really enjoy fruit in safety is by gathering it oneself or watching a trusty servant do so. The local inhabitant gathers it into the folds of his voluminous, often verminous, and invariably filthy garments and then offers you a choice handful. If, however, as often happens, it has to be brought a day's journey or more, he probably sleeps on it as well in the filthiest of huts, so doubtless the doctors' warnings are well founded.

We secured fresh ponies for our baggage, since at the rate we were travelling our marches were only rendered possible by two relays of

ponies *per diem*, and by the time that Habib ambled into Nurla on the spare pony, umbrella open as usual, for the day was cloudless and warm, a string of new beasts was standing by waiting to take on the loads while my men ate their midday meal.

Then, having eaten the last of the mulberries, I stirred Dog Bill to wakefulness, and we set out once more, our path still running along the high banks that overhang the rushing waters of the Indus. The road was dull and hot, with little to see as we plodded steadily onwards all the afternoon in a country bare of villages or fields, made up of naked rock, gaunt and black save where the sunlit rocks sprang suddenly from expanses of dazzling white sand. It was with some relief that at last we caught sight far off of the little patch of green where the highest trees of Khalatse showed above a long, low ridge, and after traversing a deep, wide ravine down whose centre foamed a sparkling torrent, we came to a halt at the jade-green tank which lies below Khalatse rest house.

There we off-saddled with thankfulness, twenty-two more honest miles behind us, miles that Dog Bill and I had trodden the whole way, though all the men had ridden in turn an hour or so at a time on the spare ponies. Tea was

very welcome that evening, and I thanked the foresight that had put a tin of condensed milk into the lunch basket, for we could get no milk at the village just then, since the flocks were not yet back from the grazing grounds.

Then, donning my less patched clothes, I climbed on to one of the ponies and, passing through the rabbit-warren of Khalatse village, made my way down towards the bungalow of the Moravian mission, which lies in the pleasant fields of the lower ground, the same bungalow in whose outskirts I had plundered apricots on my way up to Leh.

I hadn't then realised what I learnt later, that it is quite an unforgivable crime to pass by a bungalow whose inhabitants may not have seen a fellow white man for six months or more, and I desired to make amends. In the little willow plantation which surrounds the bungalow I came upon the daughter of the house, bobbed of hair and long and bare of leg, full of the *joie de vivre* of her seven years or so, and she roused the household to greet me.

The sitting-room was occupied by a basket, wherein reposed a wizened little baby whom at first sight I took to be a white infant, for its cheeks were rosy and its skin fair. On the arrival of my hostess, shod in chaplis by the

way, I discovered my error. The baby was Thibetan, an infant whom they had saved. It was not more than a fortnight old, and had been born on one of the high grazing grounds on the hills above, where its father and grandfather and the young mother had gone with their flocks. It arrived at an inopportune moment, when both the men were away, and for the best part of a day had lain there in the open by the dead mother. The two men had done their best with goat's milk fed from the stomach of a newly killed kid, out of which they contrived a rough feeding bottle, and the Moravian missionary and his wife hearing of the incident had rescued it. While I was there the ancient grandfather came round for his evening visit to see how the small person was progressing, from which I gathered that the Thibetan, unlike the Southern and Central Indian and the border tribesman, takes an active interest in his female descendants. The Punjabis as a class are better than other Indians in this respect, judging by the interest that the men in the villages seem to take in their girl babies.

I was most hospitably received, needless to say; hospitality seems to be a Moravian virtue, and it was a very pleasant evening that we spent. My hosts had only recently come to Khalatse,

which to them seemed quite an exciting, populous place after a couple of years on the Lahoul side, where for the six winter months they were entirely and completely cut off and got no mails at all. Here on the main trade route they really felt in touch with civilisation. They showed me many photos, of which those of the family crossing an 18,000-foot pass with the two children, one of them a small baby, pleased me much, but I rather wonder what many good folk I know would say if they were asked to do the like. The more I see of the missionaries in the really out-of-the-way places, anyway those of the Moravian church, the more I admire them, and when, very late for those parts, I made my way back to the rest house, I determined never more to be afraid of intruding on dwellers in lonely places, for their joy at my appearance was too transparently genuine.

Next day we started early for the long march to Bod Kharbu, which included a good pull up from the Indus valley at 9,500 feet to the top of the Photu La at 13,400, close on 4,000 feet of stiff ascent. Sidika and I made our way across the suspension bridge under the walls of the old mud castle that is not Brag Nag, but might so easily be that fortress, and crossed the sharp little divide into the shady ravine

of the Wanla Chu, deserted as ever. At Lamayuru we found traffic in large quantities in the shape of a Gurkha company of Kashmir Infantry, marching up to relieve the garrison of Leh. They were old friends from East Africa from the early, murky days of the Great War, and it was pleasant to meet them again in such far more congenial surroundings.

We took over some of the ponies with which they had crossed the pass, and after the usual halt, set out once more, and although I had one man out of two of my following riding, I'm glad to say that Dog Bill and I on our own feet made the top of the pass before anyone. I stopped there a while for a last look back at the hills over towards Leh, and though there was a lot of cloud, I was able to mark down Mount Sacrifice and was rewarded by one of the peculiar Ladakh rainbows, which seem to be independent of any rain.

Late that afternoon it came on to rain, and with Bod Kharbu still nearly three miles off, I climbed on to the pony which Sidika had ridden ever since Lamayuru, and tried to pacify my conscience with the remark that I had done twenty-two miles on foot since breakfast—a rather feeble excuse none the less for succumbing to the lazy prospect of riding.

We made a gentle march of some fourteen miles to Moulbek the following day, and taken from the Leh side the Nimaki La pass seemed hardly noticeable save only for the view it gave. We passed large numbers of Yarkandi pilgrims on the road, and Sidika, who displays no interest whatever in Bhot monasteries or Lamas, prayer wheels or Buddhist remains, was full of enthusiasm over the Yarkandis and kept on calling my attention to them, much as the home villager of unsophisticated days might have drawn your attention to soldiers returning from a war. It is quaint to think how much the *Haj* means to the Musalman—that a pilgrimage to Mecca should invest a perfectly ordinary man with a halo of romantic sanctity and a special title for the rest of his life.

The march from Moulbek to Kargil stands out in my memory from the fact that Sidika and I covered the first sixteen miles of it without a halt, five hours' non-stop going, a little memory to take back to the office chair on which I spend most of my days, wearing out the seat of my nether garments instead of the soles of my shoes. But in the pleasant groves of Pashkyum we halted for close on two hours by the side of fast-running water, and we slept shamelessly in the shade of the willows by the roadside as do

the pony men of the road whom one passes from time to time.

Then on again over the barren stretch of hilly ground that finally leads down to the green expanse of Kargil, having seen our last of Buddhist country and left Ladakh behind us. To-day we had no music to cheer us, but on the previous march our way had been lightened by one of the pony men who played haunting airs on a quaint double flute like those one sees in the hands of statuettes of Pan. I always love wild flutes; they seem to breathe the very soul of the wild mountain countries which call to me so unceasingly, and I was very grateful to the Thibetan pony man that day as he piped us along towards the Nimaki La.

From Kargil we double-marched again, twenty-one miles to the little hamlet of Tashgaon, where, as evening fell, we camped in a tiny oasis of green among the gaunt hills, in fields of barley where worked the sun-bonneted Dard women, whose clean-cut Nordic features were a change after many days of squat-visaged Mongolian folk. Having now picked up our tents again we were able to avoid rest houses. It was good to sleep under canvas once more and look out through the open tent door to the wonderful jewelled glory of the night sky among the high mountains.

The stars were as gorgeous as ever when at 4.15 the following morning we turned out with the firm intention of making Matayan that day. The last thin crescent of the waning moon looked down upon us, but her pale silver bow could not dim the glory of the great stars that blazed through the thin air above our tiny camp and Aziza's wavering red fire.

It was a pleasant march into Dras, some fifteen miles in the cool of the morning, and there we found Habib, whom I had sent ahead mounted, and who had secured us seven ponies of the Sind valley for our onward journey. Here I found the first European wayfarers I had met, a couple who had come from Kashmir across the Deosai plains. They greeted me with the usual wayside hospitality and I ate my lunch in the shadow of their tent, while later, as I followed my men on towards Matayan, a very weary little Dog Bill riding at Sidika's saddle-bow, the lady pursued me on a pony with a bundle of newspapers, a kindly thought indeed.

Hour after hour among the little hillside fields dotted with Dard women in smocks and sun-bonnets, often adorned with coloured streamers that went well with the plain white smocks and gaudy sashes. Then we reached the bare expanses before Matayan, and thereafter our road

lay over stony ground, where we passed a big caravan bound for Dras, that recalled Flecker's lines :

> " Those long caravans that face the plain
> With dauntless foot and sound of silver bell. . . ."

And so at last, with twenty-nine honest miles of foot-work behind me, our longest march, we reached the gloomy rest house of Matayan, too weary to pitch tents, and settled down for the night with the towering Macchoi peak beyond, pointing our road of the morrow as it rose sharp and naked from the great snow beds that huddle about its feet.

We slept the sleep of the worn-out that night at Matayan, and awoke to a grey and gloomy morning with great masses of cloud everywhere, and never a glimpse of blue sky. It was cold, too, and cheerless, and the prospect of the pass ahead not too inviting in view of the fact that we were anxious to make the full twenty-four miles into Sonamarg that day. Habib shook his head at the prospect and opined that we would do reasonably well if we made Baltal, for the road would be very slippery if the rain came down.

Come down it did in sheets, and by the time Sidika and I reached Macchoi there was a steady downpour all about us, and the hills were veiled

save where now and then some peak new clothed in snow would loom up through the mist. We passed a long caravan of Yarkandi pilgrims, the tail end of the gathering we had passed day after day all this last week,—the poorer folk now, on cheap, hired ponies and sometimes on foot, but all with the rapt content of men and women who have attained their heart's desire.

But as we headed steadily on towards the pass itself across the great snow-fields, rewarded by the sight of the first twisted birch trees that stood there to welcome us back to Arcadia, the sky cleared somewhat, and at the very head of the pass the rain ceased and patches of blue sky began to show. The Zoji was very beautiful with new fallen snow everywhere and great filmy wisps of soft white cloud floating low over the immense gorge where the rushing ice waters poured steadily downwards, glimpses of grey water in the great crevices that here and there broke across the white expanse of the snow.

And then, as the road began to drop again, we came to the trees, the clusters of silver-barked birch under the high limestone battlements that look down upon Baltal, while ahead of us opened the widening rift through which, now under a cloud-dappled blue sky, showed the hills on the further side of the Sind valley.

We swung briskly down the incline, on rock-cut roads once again, and presently saw far below us the dark green of the Baltal birch glades and the wide expanses of turf meadows where lies the track to Sonamarg.

The towering cliffs receded as we made our way downwards, passing a pleasure party upward bound to have a picnic lunch on the snow at Kainpatri—no travellers these, as the clothes betokened—the women's skirts and the men's boots belonged to Srinagar and Gulmarg. Sidika and I must have looked rag-bags beside them as we stood aside on the edge of a snow slide to let them make their way over the foot-wide path that snaked across it.

And thus at last we descended into the higher reaches of Arcadia, to lie once more on flower-starred turf with all about us tree-clothed hill-sides, unfamiliar these many days. Both of us were soaking wet and were grateful for the hot sun. I ate my lunch and read a pocket anthology of verse, which like myself was more than damp, but we dried quickly enough in that baking sun.

I looked back at the slopes towards the pass, pondering over the long road we had trodden, the fascinating country we had passed through, and although for the moment it was pleasant

to be back again in the softness of Kashmir, there was haunting longing at my heart to set out again once more, to return to the bare, gaunt hills of the Other Side.

I suppose some of us are made that way—for I honestly don't think we make ourselves—made to take delight in the wilder, harder places, whereas the majority of mankind prefers the smiling places, the softness and charm of rich country-sides fragrant with flowers and fern, long sweeps of undulating tree-clothed hills, the pleasant ripple of brooks and the dreaminess of slow rivers among fertile fields and populous villages. Perhaps we others have opposite tastes because the richer places would hamper us too much, would take away such courage as we have for facing life, would make us forget altogether that life is only a road, such a road as that to Lamaland, with high passes and deep valleys, shadowed gorges and sunlit peaks, that can be reached only by high endeavour from day to day, a road that needs faith in oneself and in one's ideals if one is ever to reach the goal and not remain drifting about aimlessly until the end comes in the misty flats of the lower levels.

At least that is how it seems to me, and I'm grateful for being made so that the wilder places

call to me so much, that despite temporary lapses the harder roads seem always the sweeter to tread, for realising that the gold-splashed peaks are only glorious by comparison with the dark gorges below.

Reflecting thus in the sunlit peace and beauty of the Baltal valley, I was aroused by Habib's arrival considerably earlier than I had expected. Behind him came my string of ponies and men, all anxious now that the pass was crossed to push on the remaining nine miles to Sonamarg, to reach the comfort of its serai and feel that the days of hard marching were over for the present.

Then, with a last glance at the high peaks we had left, I followed them down the winding track into the birch glades that fringe the road to Sonamarg, and so came back once more in the grey mistiness of a rainy Kashmir evening to the comparative civilisation of Arcadia, to tented camps and respectably clothed folk, taking the air among the firs of Thajiwas; 450 miles of road behind me, of the most fascinating road it has yet been my lot to tread, the road to Lamaland, which I think is one of the roads that lead to the Kingdom of Dreams.

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